

# Screen

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## cover illustration

Micro-cinematographic view of a chemical substance from *Uit het rijk der Kristallen/From the Domain of Crystals* (Mol, 1928). Collection Nederlands Filmmuseum.

# Wonders of cinematic abstraction: J. C. Mol and the aesthetic experience of science film

MALIN WAHLBERG

Nature *au naturel*, full of flies, mosquitoes, mud, rats, and cockroaches, is incompatible with refined pleasures such as bodily hygiene and elegance of dress.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The principal character of Mario Vargas Llosa's novel, *Don Rigoberto*, is a proud *homo urbanis* who frowns in disdain at the mere idea of nature 'in the raw'. Mediated through the artist's temperament, however, nature is transformed, and he comes to worship the sunflowers and wheatfields that 'distil their golden honey into the canvases of van Gogh'.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a microscopic view of a chemical substance or the cinematic rendering of a growing plant may transform unassuming entities in nature into spectacular objects. In classical film theory, the genre of science film has been almost entirely omitted, and few scholars have associated the aesthetic pleasure of moving images or the imaginary realm of cinema with science film and related documentary fields of filmmaking. Science film is marked by the epistemological drive of educational cinema, a film culture considered incompatible with the production and reception of film as art. However, science film represents a context in which film experiments challenge the limits of natural perception and whose amateur innovations have contributed greatly to the history of experimental cinema.

*Don Rigoberto's* celebration of nature mediated and transformed into visual art may indeed apply to the experiments of science film, although they were rarely intended as imaginative abstractions of the real.

The work by Dutch photo amateur and public lecturer Jan Cornelis Mol (1891–1954) exemplifies the important presence of both science film and amateur film in the history of experimental cinema – a historiography traditionally dedicated to the formal achievements of films canonized within the designation ‘avant-garde’. In the beginning of the 1920s, Mol started to experiment with cinematography as a tool for scientific inquiry. While Don Rigoberto’s loathing of nature appears to be the opposite of the scientist’s obsession with natural phenomena, aesthetic experience does apply to Mol’s cinema, although the creative transformations found in his work also result from the technological achievements of camera perception and editing.

Mol’s numerous contributions to journals of amateur photography and film testify to his fascination with visual technologies and camera perception. He was thrilled by techniques with which to screen processes invisible to the human eye.<sup>3</sup> Films such as *Ontlukeinele bloemen/Opening Flower* (1928) and *Van bol tot bloem/From Bulb to Flower* (1931) illuminate the fact that, in educational, industrial and science films, we may indeed have an aesthetic experience. Moreover, manipulated views of flowers sprouting and dying offer a filmic counterpart to today’s digital morphing, where a natural process has been temporally compressed into a screen event at once comprehensive and uncanny. Mol’s films explore the space–time relationship of moving images beyond notions of realism and narration, and the magic of these screen events resides in the play with documentation and abstraction of a pro-filmic realm.

*Uit het rijk der kristallen/From the Domain of Crystals* (1928) shows chemical substances abstracted by microcinematography into a metamorphosis of sparkling crystals (figure 1). In 1929, at the invitation of Abel Gance, this film was shown at an avant-garde theatre in Paris, where it was referred to as the latest craze of ‘cinéma pur’. This screening also established Mol as a celebrated member of the Dutch Filmliga – the avant-garde association of Joris Ivens and other Dutch filmmakers initiated in Amsterdam two years earlier. The unlikely event of an amateur filmmaker and science lecturer entering the highbrow context of avant-garde art reminds us that the usual distinction between art cinema and science film did not apply to the film experiments of the 1920s.

In this article, the example of J. C. Mol offers the point of departure for a general reflection on the history of experimental cinema and the meanings of aesthetic experience and imagination in documentary representation, film theories and the avant-garde manifestos of the 1920s. Mol’s films illuminate the fascination with space–time abstraction and visualized rhythm that unifies the practice of science film and avant-garde cinema in that era.<sup>4</sup>

Mol’s work in the 1920s – films classified as amateur, science, educational, industrial and avant-garde – is a remarkably broad representation of the multiple facets of experimental cinema. In the context of considering Mol’s work, this essay also provides a brief

3 During 1925–9, Mol published eighty-seven articles in various Dutch photo and film journals. Bert Hogenkamp, *J. C. Mol: Een fimografisch en bibliografisch overzicht van zijn Nederlandse werk* (Hilversum: Nederlands Audiovisueel Archief, 2000).

4 In this essay, I consider J. C. Mol’s career only through the 1920s and the 1930s. For a complete biography and account of Mol’s contribution to Dutch cinema, see Bert Hogenkamp, ‘De Witte jas of “oneindige variaties op hetzelfde thema”: J. C. Mol als mentor van wetenschappelijke, amateur en avant-garde film in Nederland 1924–32’, *GBG-Nieuws*, vol. 32 (Spring 1995), pp. 4–11 and *De Nederlandse documentaire film 1920–1940* (Amsterdam and Utrecht: Van Gennep/Stichting Film en Wetenschap, 1988).

**Figure 1**  
**Micro-cinematographic view of a**  
**chemical substance. *Uit het rijk***  
***der Kristallen/From the Domain of***  
***Crystals*. J. C. Mol, The**  
**Netherlands, 1928. Collection**  
**Nederlands Filmmuseum.**



reassessment of classical film theory, including the predominant ideas of aesthetic experience and cinema as a time-based medium. Mol's films express a passion for science and nature, which in turn coincides with his strong interest in camera optics and cinematic perception. His focus on the possibilities and limitations of filmic representation corresponds with related conceptions and experiments of visualized rhythm and manipulated views. Rather than suggesting all-embracing notions of 'perceptual modes in the modern era', the discussion here will centre on some highlights within a shifting landscape of visual technology and cinematic practice.

To begin, it is important to emphasize how and why the cinematographic achievement of photo amateur and science lecturer J. C. Mol fits into the scholarly debate on film aesthetics and experimental cinema, which traditionally has a narrow conception of art cinema and the related canon of avant-garde films. The history of experimental film has often been subsumed under or equated with the history of avant-garde cinema, that is, 'the artists in each period have been reified as knights of film art, fighting heroically, individually, only loosely bound together in a movement at the level of distribution, exhibition, and reception'.<sup>5</sup> The present account of Mol's work – representing a single corpus of films achieved outside a commercial film industry – would seem to support this way of thinking, but for Mol, cinema was primarily a scientific and pedagogical means of research and education. His film experiments grew out of an amateur's will to master technology and control production and screening.<sup>6</sup>

Reviewing Mol's films, it is nevertheless striking how his elaborate experiments parallel avant-garde projects of that era. Both science film and art cinema provided conceptual inquiries into camera optics and the space–time malleability of moving images. Despite obvious differences, a comparison of Mol's rhythmic rendering of micro-cinematographic

<sup>5</sup> Jan-Christopher Horak, 'The first American film Avant-Garde, 1919–1945', in Jan-Christopher Horak (ed.), *Lovers of Cinema: the First American Film Avant-garde, 1919–1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> The essays in Horak's anthology *Lovers of Cinema* address social, cultural and economic aspects of experimental cinema beyond a mere history of film *auteurs*, thus assisting in understanding the variety of experimental film beyond the canonized field of avant-garde cinema.

7 Walter Benjamin, 'The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Walter Benjamin Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1988), p. 238.

8 Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), p. 116.

9 Horak, 'The First American Film', p. 35.

10 Hogenkamp, 'De Witte jas', p. 7.

11 Lisa Cartwright, *Screening the Body: Tracing Medicine's Visual Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 90–1.

views with, for example, Walter Ruttmann's work on absolute film and the city symphony reveals a shared fascination with cinematic perception. As described by Walter Benjamin, the mimetic impulse of filmic representation thus gives way to 'a new tactility', that is, the desire to reproduce movement is conflated with the desire to document the cinematic movement itself.<sup>7</sup> The appreciation of nature represented and transformed by cinematic perception is typical of experimental cinema in the early twentieth century, as well as of amateur practices inquiring into the moving image as photographic representation and filmic form. The experimental approach to cinematic vision points to the paradoxical coexistence of a perception that presents itself as becoming perception, or a vision beyond the parameters of binocular vision. As Rosalind E. Krauss suggests, the modernist enthusiasm with the photograph consisted in the belief in its vision as 'an extraordinary extension of normal vision, one that supplements the deficiencies of the naked eye'.<sup>8</sup>

Mol did not call himself an avant-garde artist, and his affiliation with science and film, rather than film and art, underscores the necessity of considering the historical context in which he worked. Debunking the role of the experimental filmmaker as a heroic knight of film art does not imply that one should focus exclusively on the production context. It is therefore important to acknowledge the interrelated contexts of science cinema and avant-garde filmmaking while also looking at the style and reception of individual films. In Jan-Christopher Horak's outline of the history of experimental cinema, Mol is paired with the French surrealist filmmaker and marine biologist Jean Painlevé.<sup>9</sup> Aside from their shared interest in science and cinematography, an affinity of film style is also apparent. As discussed later in this article, some of Mol's films reveal a playful reflexivity reminiscent of Painlevé's humorous narratives, although the surrealist's celebration of marine animals or bloodsucking bats surpasses the educational intent of Mol's films and public lectures. Mol's science cinema was foremost a pedagogical tool for the lecture hall and a means of carefully documenting and measuring events and objects in nature.

In the Netherlands in the 1920s, unlike in other European countries and the USA, science film was not an established practice. Scientists were familiar with filmic tools, though, and in 1912 the physics department at Groningen University invested in an expensive camera device to improve the practice of microcinematography. According to Bert Hogenkamp, no films or other materials exist to indicate whether the Groningen team was successful or if their results were acknowledged abroad.<sup>10</sup> Lisa Cartwright refers to later experiments of microcinematography in the USA, such as a 1928 project in New York at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research, in which researchers attempted to record and project the flow of blood in the capillaries of a living frog.<sup>11</sup> In comparison with this professional context of scientific research, it is striking that, in 1920, Mol had already achieved a

microscopic depiction of a worm in his film *Ancylostoma*. He further studied circulation in living beings in *Bloedsomloop* (1925). For obvious reasons, microcinematography offered an important instrument for Mol's scientific research and was also a useful device in the lecture hall, where he could project images that otherwise would be restricted to an observer with a microscope.

In 1924, Mol founded the Bureau voor Wetenschappelijke Kinematografie (Bureau for Scientific Cinematography) in Bloemendaal, outside Haarlem. Unfortunately, he left no notes or diary accounts about this organization, but the films he made were apparently scientific experiments and pedagogical material to support his scholarly endeavours. Mol gave hundreds of lectures in adult education classes. His only affiliation with a university was via Dr W. H. van Seters at Leiden University. Their collaboration resulted in two films in 1924, *Antony van Leeuwenhoek* (on the life and work of this naturalist, who specialized in microscopic representations) and *Malariafilm* (depicting a mosquito and the spread of malaria). Despite the fact that Mol was a self-taught scientist and filmmaker, his experiments in microcinematography made him a pioneer in the development and refinement of this technique.<sup>12</sup>

Although Mol did not explicitly refer to the avant-garde writings and manifestos of his time, it is striking how the notions of visualized rhythm and the transformation of the real in moving images represent common denominators between avant-garde cinema and science film. In film theories and experiments in the 1910s and 1920s, cinema was celebrated as a new art form more akin to music than literature or theatre. The fascination with the moving image as rhythm and sensory pulse-beat is apparent in the large number of manifestos, essays and film reviews. The musical analogy appears early in the history of French film criticism, but a more noteworthy theoretical application occurred during the second half of the 1920s. As one example, the composer and film critic Émile Vuillermoz was interested in the achievement and perception of 'cinematographic music'. He wrote that cinema resembles music in that it is an art form in which a line of thought is mediated through the use of leading motifs, changes in tempo and rhythmic highlights. Similarly, a filmmaker must find a suitable phrasing, a significant rhythm: 'He [the filmmaker] must calculate the length of his sequences and know what length he may give to his arabesque without risking what might be called the viewers' tonal sensation of his composition'.<sup>13</sup> The cinematic possibilities of visualized rhythm were related to the fact that film and music offer a unity in time and space in addition to containing temporal extension.<sup>14</sup> Vuillermoz also stressed that the experiences of film and of music depend on similar physiological reactions and that, 'after all, the optical nerve and the auditory nerve have the same faculties of vibration'.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Hogenkamp, 'De Witte jas', p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Émile Vuillermoz, 'La musique des images', in *L'art cinématographique III* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1927), p. 60.

<sup>14</sup> This was equally the principle of music as a 'temporal object' (*Zeitobjekt*), according to Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time* (1893–1917), trans. John Barnett Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1991), p. 24.

<sup>15</sup> Vuillermoz, 'La musique des images' p. 59.

Similar ideas reverberate in the theory and cinema of Germaine Dulac, who stands out as one of the most passionate advocates of a 'symphonic cinema'. In her texts from 1925 and onward, she often stressed cinema's rhythmic structuring of durational units. These ideas were formalized in her attempts in 1927–9 to cinematographically interpret music by Debussy and Chopin: *Disque 927*, *Arabesque* and *Thèmes et variation*. In an article from 1927, she emphasized the cinematic counterpart to the affective sensation of musical rhythm:

Visual rhythm in correspondence with musical rhythm makes the cinematographic movement to stage the signification and force of movement in general. This is a qualitative fact of harmonic duration that has to be transformed into, if I dare to describe it as such, sonorities constituted from the emotions contained within the image itself. In cinematographic measurement, visual rhythms correspond to musical rhythms (which lend weight and meaning to general movement). These visual acts, as valuable as the lengthy harmonic passages, transform themselves, I dare say, from the sounds derived from the emotions found within the image itself.<sup>16</sup>

Not only was film claimed to resemble the transcendent and affective impact of musical sound, but it also offered the composed structure of a symphony. A recurrent theme in Vuillermoz's commentary is the acknowledgment of an abstract logic according to which the movements of the frame, and between the frames, are measured. He wrote that the filmmaker, like the musician, has to find convenient places of punctuation and acceleration, to obtain a nuanced pulse.

In 1919, filmmaker and critic Albert Guyot had offered some suggestions for the elaboration of a cinematic measure. Mathematics was, according to him, the common trait of music and cinema, both of which depend on elaborated methods of measurement.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the composer or the filmmaker is 'a man who counts. When he does not count, he measures. Just as in music, mathematical precision is at the core of cinema'.<sup>18</sup>

The emphasis on rhythm as measured interval and sensory pulse-beat corresponds closely with contemporaneous ideas in the early twentieth century about phenomenology and psychoanalysis. Attempted visualizations of sensory perception and the subconscious arose at the same time as the appropriation of musical terms in film criticism of this era. However, filmmakers and theorists acknowledged the technology and experience of the cinematic perception (which differs from phenomenology and Edmund Husserl's analysis of the subject's perception of a material world, the 'sensa' of the thing-in-itself). The interest in cinematic perception coincides with the fascination with a modern technology, which, similar to photography, complicated and transformed the relationship between natural perception and representation in visual art.

16 Germaine Dulac, 'Les esthétiques, les entraves la cinégraphie intégrale', in *L'art cinématographique II* (Paris: Librairie Félix Alcan, 1927), p. 44.

17 From 1919 on, Louis Delluc also stressed mathematical precision as a common trait of film and music. See Noureddine Ghali, *L'avant-garde cinématographique en France dans les années vingt: idées, conceptions, theories* (Paris: Éditions Paris Expérimental, 1995), p.146.

18 Ibid, p. 144.



19 For an extended account of time measurement in classical film theory, see Malin Wahlberg, *Documentary Time: a Critique of Film and Phenomenology*, in the *Visible Evidence* series (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).

20 Marta Braun, *Picturing Time: the work of Etienne-Jules Marey (1830–1904)* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 24, 27, 61.

21 Cartwright, *Screening the Body*, p. 91.

22 Ibid.

The space–time malleability of experimental cinema could be referred to in terms of ‘time measurement’. I believe that this notion accurately describes the conceptual approach to the time-image of cinema in avant-garde theory and practice.<sup>19</sup> The theme of time measurement is also relevant for science cinema, whose purpose is to measure and depict the process of natural events. It stresses temporalization as a figural process realized between the time of the image and the time of the film experience.

How do rhythm and time measurement materialize in Mol’s science films? Visual analyses of science cinema lead beyond clear-cut distinctions between representation and abstraction. Regarding the scientific context of production and the educational aim of these representations, the ambivalent status of visual documentation recalls the analytic images of Etienne-Jules Marey’s machines such as the myograph (which graphically depicts the phases and speed of muscle contractions), the odograph (which records the number, frequency and simultaneity of footsteps) and the photographic gun (which shoots a series of images at 1/720 second to capture, for example, the flight of a gull).<sup>20</sup> In Marey’s work, analogical representation and graphic abstraction fuse in a way similar to the ambivalence of the film image between the static imprint of the frame and the projected sequence of movement and change.

In Mol’s work, the educational study of, for example, a mosquito and the spread of malaria in *Malariafilm* (1924) meets with a contemplation of plants and crystals in cinematic transformation. This ‘aesthetics of abstraction’ partly coincides with the ‘flatness, segmentation, and planar division of space’ that, according to Lisa Cartwright, characterizes experiments with both cubism and microcinematography in the early decades of the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Cartwright considers this stylistic similarity between art and science beyond any ‘personal influence or historical coincidence’: rather, it mirrors an overall ‘cultural response to the epistemological instability of human observation and to the sight of the human body’, because representations in the modern era are marked by ‘the notion of the body-in-process and its streamlined physiological time-image’.<sup>22</sup> However, Mol’s approach to cinematic abstraction involves more than the transverse section of a magnified specimen or the depiction of microbes invading the system of a living being. Another distinguishing mark is his preference for flowers and their life span of sprouting and fading. Aside from the cinematic depiction of natural processes invisible to the eye, this preference for space–time abstraction or the cinematic measurement of movement and gestures also characterizes some of his later films.

*Altijd Welkom/Rhapsody in Brown* (1935) is a feature-length film produced by Droste, the Dutch chocolate factory in Haarlem. The film offers a peculiar mix of industrial publicity and absolute film, in which a typical documentary ‘voice of God’ remarks on the splendid manufacture of cocoa powder and boxes of assorted chocolates. With its explanatory



voiceover and narrative structure marked by the beginning and end of the assembly line, *Rhapsody in Brown* contains a clearly educational ambition. At the end of the line and in the final shots of the film, a series of close-ups show happy children devouring chocolate creams. In this film the pedagogical depiction and enthusiastic promotion of the chocolate production is realized in a style that seems closely aligned with Soviet montage films such as *Zemlja/Earth* (Alexander Dovzhenko, 1930): the abstract framings of chocolates in endless rows (figure 2) and a robotic spade turning the glossy melted chocolate also remain faithful to the principles of absolute film. The enduring framing of melted chocolate relates also to the poetic contemplation of objects and movement in Joris Ivens's work, such as *Regen/Rain* (1927) or *De Brug/The Bridge* (1928).

Hence, *Rhapsody in Brown* comments on movement and form, and, not least, tempo and rhythm. The movement of machines, or the endless passing of chocolates in rows, meets up with the duration and change inflicted by editing. With the scientist's interest in measuring and analyzing the world, the process is represented with a strong effect of shape and movement. Before considering Mol's earlier film experiments, let us return to the film criticism and avant-garde experiments of the 1920s.

As already suggested, film has been recognized primarily as a time-based medium, dependent on the artistic elaboration of rhythm and tempo. The emphasis on the constructed metre of film involves the recognition of pulse, duration and change, and of film as an expression closely affiliated with the human nervous system – heartbeats as well as the quick change of mental life in dreams and hallucinations. Aside from futurist visions of man and machine, and surrealist projects to map the subconscious, these assumptions and experiments posit film in terms of measure and interval – a kinetic event that requires the viewer's sensory

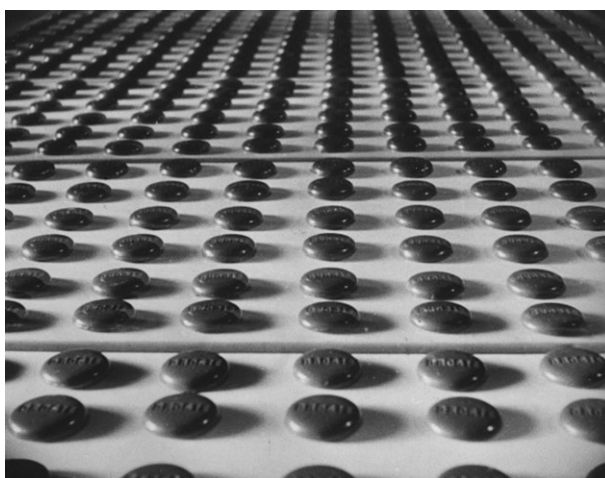


Figure 2  
Chocolate creams at the Droste  
factory. *Altijd Welkom/Rhapsody  
in Brown*. J. C. Mol, The  
Netherlands, 1935. Collection  
Nederlands Filmmuseum.

reception. Put differently, cinema was the great promise of a visual poetry, directly appealing to a viewer's imagination and desire. Like music, the ultimate cinematic expression would interact directly with a viewer's emotions.

The suggested kinship between music and film was rooted in the idea of pure visual rhythm. As artists and theorists celebrated the expressive potentiality of film, strategies were outlined to translate auditory rhythm into a cinematic choreography. The discourse of rhythm includes various 'Gesamtkunstwerk' such as *Parade* (1917), a ballet by, among others, Erik Satie and Guillaume Apollinaire. Also, in the debut of Paris Dada, led by Tristan Tzara, performances such as *Vaseline symphonique* (1920) offered theatrical shock effects through conceptual explorations of the spatiality of vocal rhythms.<sup>23</sup>

Subsequently within French and German experimental cinema between 1921 and 1925, some films were explicitly aimed at a visualization of musical rhythm, such as *Ballet mécanique* (Ferdinand Léger, Man Ray and Dudley Murphy, 1924), *Entr'acte* (René Clair, 1923) and *Cinq minutes de cinéma pur/Five Minutes of Pure Cinema* (Henri Chomette, 1925). Hans Richter, Walter Ruttmann and Viking Eggeling also offered graphic approaches to rhythm in *Rhythmus 21,22,21,25* (Hans Richter, 1921–5), *Opus I–IV* (Richter, 1921–4), *Horizontell-vertikal orkester* (Viking Eggeling, 1919), *Diagonalsymfonin/Diagonal Symphony* (Eggeling, 1924) and *Opus II–IV* (Walter Ruttmann, 1926).

In addition, the emphasis on rhythm and tempo is of course pivotal in the work of Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov. One of the crucial notions of Eisenstein's montage theory, the 'monistic ensemble', references the samisen music of Japanese Kabuki theatre. This music is characterized by its organization of multiple auditory elements to match the dynamic coexistence of auditory and visual levels in cinema. Hence, rhythm is a tool to control the creation of meaning as well as the affective response of the audience, and the ideal realization of tempo will transfer the images in discrete units of an overall discourse. The successful interaction of the pulse-beat of the film with that of the viewer – the experience of rhythm and the becoming of a significant whole – is an experiential dimension that Eisenstein elaborated in theory and in practice.<sup>24</sup>

Opposing Eisenstein's ideal of discrete units of rhythm is Vertov's concept of 'interval', which refers to the intersection between film shots, a differentiated zone of becoming through which the film's images in constant change provide a significant metre: 'The school of kino-eye calls for construction of the film-object upon "intervals", that is, upon the movement between shots, upon the visual correlation of shots with one another, upon transitions from one visual stimulus to another'.<sup>25</sup> In *Chelovek skinoapparatom/Man with the Movie Camera* (1929), dissolves, split-screen devices and distorted perspectives orchestrate the cinematic components, and rhythm becomes conceptual: the rhythm of montage, the inscription of rhythms before the camera, the rhythm

<sup>23</sup> 'In Tzara's *Vaseline symphonique* ... twenty people sing ascending scales first on the syllable *cra*, followed by ascending scales one third higher on the syllable *cri* ... etcetera, ad infinitum'. Christopher Schiff, 'Banging on the Windowpane', in Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (eds), *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-garde* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), p. 151.

<sup>24</sup> For example, see Sergei Eisenstein, 'The fourth dimension in cinema', in Richard Taylor (ed.), *Eisenstein Writings 1922–1934* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 186–7.

<sup>25</sup> Dziga Vertov, 'From kino-eye to radio-eye', in Annette Michelson (ed.), *Kino-Eye: the Writings of Dziga Vertov* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984), p. 90.

within the fragmented structure of the frame and the rhythm within the relation between the fictionalized camera-eye and the viewer's experience. Vertov's contribution to the discourse on visualized rhythm can be found in this reflexive concern for the cinematic, which is accomplished innovatively through a playful conceptualization of filmmaking and film experience.<sup>26</sup>

Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, as well as René Clair, Walter Ruttmann and Viking Eggeling, offered aesthetic models for the new cinema cherished by the Dutch Film League. An eventful screening of Vsevolod Pudovkin's *Mat/The Mother* (1926) prompted the initial manifesto of 25 June 1927, *Manifest Filmliga Amsterdam*, which in September of the same year led to the organization of Der Nederlandsche Filmliga (the Dutch Film League). For political reasons, some mayors had prohibited their Dutch cities from participating in the national opening of *The Mother*. In response to this censorship, which was violently opposed by a number of filmmakers, journalists and students, an underground screening of Pudovkin's film took place on the night of 12 May. Some politicians were present at the screening, and their influence and the audience's appreciation of the film caused the prohibition against showing *The Mother* in Dutch movie houses to be lifted later the same year.<sup>27</sup>

The Amsterdam Filmliga manifesto called for a cinema in opposition to commercial film culture, arguing that only on one of a hundred occasions 'do we see *film*. Usually we see nothing but *cinema*, crowds, the commercial regime, America, kitsch.'<sup>28</sup> To counter the threat to 'real film', the manifesto promised a series of public screenings, and, hence, the possibility of a new culture dedicated to *film*: 'Saturdays during the coming season of 1927–8, about 12 matinees will be shown in Amsterdam, among which we will show one important new film every week to a genuinely artistic-minded audience'.<sup>29</sup>

Aside from the expected avant-garde rejection of mainstream cinema, the manifesto also advocated for international support of experimental film. The first issue of the *Orgaan der Nederlandsche Filmliga*, published in September 1927, presented two 'foreign correspondents': Mannus Franken in Paris and Simon Koster in Berlin, who were to report all screenings and other film events of interest to the Filmliga. This issue, edited by Menno Ter Braak, Joris Ivens, L. J. Jordan, Henrik Scholte and Constant van Wessem, promoted a fresh approach to film critique, film and audience and film technique. For example, regarding accepted ideas about 'film realism', El. D. De Roos emphasized that the film experience should go beyond notions of realism, reality or unreality and instead acknowledge a new, formal conceptualization of 'filmic reality' (*film realiteit*).<sup>30</sup> This materialist celebration of the moving image is further expressed in Ivens's essay, 'Film technique. Notes on the succession of film images'.<sup>31</sup> This short piece on the constructed entity of tempo and the use of rhythm and duration stresses the metric and 'composed' texture of absolute film. Ivens praises the experiments of absolute film

26 To this it should be added that Vertov's approach to rhythm and the sensory pulse-beat of film also involves important experiments with sound, silence and music, such as in *Entuziazm: Simfoniia Donbassa* (USSR, 1930). For a thorough analysis on the auditory aspects of Vertov's theory and practice, see John MacKay, 'Disorganized noise: *Enthusiasm* and the ear of the collective', *Kinoculture* vol. 7 (January 2005).

27 Gerdin Linthorst, 'Het geloof in de zuivere, autonome film', *Filmkrant*, vol. 128 (November 1992), pp. 6–7.

28 The *Manifest Filmliga Amsterdam* was written in 1927 by Henrik Scholte, Menno Ter Braak, Cees Laseur, L. J. Jordaan, Joris Ivens, Charley Toorop, H. J. G. Ivens and Ed. Pelster. The manifesto, together with the first issue of the *Orgaan der Nederlandsche Filmliga* is reprinted in *Skrien*, vol. 100 (October 1980), pp. 1–14 and 28. Quoted at p. 1.

29 Ibid.

30 El. D. De Roos, 'Film en Publiek', in *Manifest Filmliga Amsterdam*, p. 4.

31 Joris Ivens, 'Filmtechniek: eenige notities over de opvolging van de beelden in de film', in *Manifest Filmliga Amsterdam*, p. 5.

32 Ibid.

for conceptualizing the organization of the moving image into ‘an almost mathematical movement’ (‘bijna mathematische gang’) and for extending the formal possibilities of filmic inscription and projection.<sup>32</sup> Thus rather than differentiating art from science, the Filmliga actively questioned this dichotomy. With their emphasis on measurement and cinematographic experiments to challenge and transgress the limits of perception, the scientific context and aims of Mol’s work fit into the Filmliga’s constructs and aesthetic ideals.

Mol wrote a number of articles for amateur journals on photography and film, which provide some insight into his thoughts about filmmaking and science. During the 1920s, he published articles in *De Camera*, *Focus*, *De Hollandsche Steden*, *Het Lichtbeeld* and *Lux-De Camera*. These journals deal primarily with technical details such as the use of different lenses, colouring devices, objectives and techniques such as how to use soft-focus photography or photograph ice crystals.<sup>33</sup> During 1926 and 1927, the articles reflected his increased interest in lighting devices and exposure time for photography and film, as well as for trick film techniques such as slow motion (‘De vertraagde film’).<sup>34</sup>

In this context it is striking how the notion of time measurement both interrelates and differentiates the film experiments of science film and avant-garde cinema. I have already referred to avant-garde theories and experiments wherein the cinematic rendering of space and time was associated with the transcendental performance of music: the metre of film invokes subconscious movements of dreams and hallucinations as well as the viewer’s physiological, embodied response to moving images. Although the play with fast forward, reverse motion and slow motion in avant-garde cinema reverberates in some of Mol’s films, time measurement takes on a literal meaning in his experiments. The possibility of extending, reversing and compressing a preordained movement in time and space on the screen becomes a pedagogical device, producing a vivid demonstration which supports the analysis and explanation of natural processes. Nevertheless, the results of these scientific inquiries are cinematic abstractions that stress the moving image as plastic form.

By 1923, Mol referred to the ‘crucial position’ of cinematography in modern society and, more specifically, to the possibilities of its application in science: ‘cinematography has already, and with promising results, served in the fields of technology and science’.<sup>35</sup> In his article entitled ‘A Filmic Practice’, Mol described the new Ernemann camera. This German invention by Hans Lehmann – a camera capable of shooting 500 frames per second – is better known as ‘Zeitlupe’ (in Dutch, *tijdloope*). In his successive attempts to refine the cinematic depiction of plants growing in real-time, Mol used and experimented with this technique. Describing the *tijdloope* for the readers of *Focus*, Mol had great hopes for its scientific use and also expressed his fascination with the screening of processes invisible to the human eye: ‘It is hard to foresee what scientific services are to be expected from the *tijdloope*’.<sup>36</sup>

33 In 1923, J. C. Mol wrote a series of eight articles on soft-focus photography published in *Focus*. In relation to ice crystals see, J. C. Mol, ‘Het fotografeeren van ijsbloemen’, *De Camera* vol. 18, no. 7 (February 1, 1926), pp. 90–2.

34 For example, J. C. Mol, ‘Een nieuwe Fotometer’, *De Camera*, vol. 19, no. 8 (October 9, 1926), pp. 129–30; ‘Filmknipsels IX. Filmtrucs’, *De Camera* vol. 19, no. 11 (November 20, 1926), pp. 129, 175–7; ‘Filmknipsels XI. Filmtrucs II (De vertraagde film)’, *De Camera* vol. 19, no. 14 (January 1, 1927), pp. 224–5.

35 J. C. Mol, ‘Een Filmpraatje’, *Focus* vol. 10, no. 6 (22 March 1923), p. 115.

36 Ibid., p. 117.

Although the principle of this space–time abstraction is simple, he remarked, its fascination lies in how cinematography makes it possible to visualize this altered form.

Mol's combined passion for nature, camera technology and the optics of cinema resembles that of surrealist and marine biologist Jean Painlevé. Mol found inspiration in Painlevé's films, which he praised for their level of abstraction. Yet, he disliked the irony and playful personification in Painlevé's documentation of marine life.<sup>37</sup> In 1930, Painlevé founded the Association for Photographic and Cinematic Documentation in Science and developed techniques to shoot footage underwater, but he considered himself a popular filmmaker too, and films such as *L'Hippocampe/The Seahorse* (1934) were celebrated as surrealist film art.<sup>38</sup> Different from the ironic tone of Painlevé's films (which are at once science films and mock-documentaries), Mol's projects of documentation and measurement are more closely affiliated with traditional educational film. Where Painlevé demonstrated an ironic distance from the truth-claim of science cinema, Mol remained obsessed with the microcosms of plants and minerals.<sup>39</sup>

Despite this suspicion of a reframing and allegorization of the natural world, many of Mol's films express a desiring gaze and a poetic contemplation that lead beyond the putative transparency of educational cinema. These, together with a dose of humour, are apparent in *De tijd en de film/Time and the Film* (1928) – one of Mol's more conceptual approaches to the time of the film image. The first part of the film offers a veritable screen lecture on cinematic time.<sup>40</sup> 'Natural movement' in the film is illustrated by a military parade shot in normal speed. An intertitle explains:

A film consists of a series of thousands of little pictures. If when projected the same number of pictures is shown on the screen each second, as the number of pictures which was taken in a second, we see *the natural movement* on the screen . . . . If we take the pictures more quickly, however, the movements on the screen are retarded; it looks as if time is going more slowly.<sup>41</sup>

An orchestra parades in slow motion, followed by a sprint and a horse and carriage in equally slowed tempo. 'In the same way, time can also be accelerated', the text proceeds, leading to a sequence where we can see the comic gestures of bricklayers and construction workers in speeded-up action. The most spectacular illustration is shown after the intertitle: 'One can even make time go back: then the movements are reversed'. Amsterdam bikers go backwards, cars and people are screened in reversed street views, the sport of hurdles gains in drama through the uncanny perception of remote action, and, finally, a little boy 'builds' a banana by pulling small bites from his mouth until the fruit is rewrapped in its peel.

This illustration of the manipulated space–time of cinema is followed by a study of plants and opening flowers (figures 3 and 4).

37 Ibid., p. 8.

38 The filmography of Jean Painlevé consists of thirty-eight films, of which, according to their context of screening, eleven have been dubbed 'popular films' and twenty-seven 'research films'. Brigitte Berg, 'Contradictory forces: Jean Painlevé, 1902–1989', in Andy Masaki Bellows and Marina McDougall (eds), *Science is Fiction: the Films of Jean Painlevé* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), p. 25.

39 In 1947, Mol contributed to the making of *Metamorphose*, a poetic contemplation on the short life of butterflies by Herman van der Horst. This film, which was also produced by Mol's company, 'Multifilm' in Haarlem, comes very close to the work by Painlevé.

40 A written account of the filmic devices of *De Tijd in de film/Time and the Film* is offered in an article with the same title by J. C. Mol, 'De tijd in de film', *Het Lichtbeeld* vol. 6, no. 1 (January 1928), pp. 5–9.

41 Intertitles from *De tijd en de film/Time and the Film* (1928), quoted from the English version at the Amsterdam Film Museum.

**Figure 3**  
*Ontlukeinele bloemen/Opening*  
 Flower. J. C. Mol, The  
 Netherlands, 1928. Collection  
 Nederlands Filmmuseum.



‘Everything in nature accelerates’, Mol suggests, pondering on the beauty of flowers ‘accelerated tens of thousands of times’. There then follows the metamorphosis of the chrysanthemum, the star of Bethlehem, a campanula, a carnation and a passion flower. The organic and, to our eye, static life forms of the flowers are here animated and visualized in captivating sequences of manipulated space–time.

In the early 1930s, Mol elaborated his technique of filming the growing and fading of plants. These attempts to visualize natural processes in approximate real-time reflect the science filmmaker’s experimentation with time measurement and the visualization of rhythm. In order not to disturb their natural rhythm, the plants were set up in a room flooded with daylight. A clock controlled the coordination of

**Figure 4**  
*Ontlukeinele bloemen/Opening*  
 Flower. J. C. Mol, The  
 Netherlands, 1928. Collection  
 Nederlands Filmmuseum.





curtains and camera flashes, and one frame was exposed every quarter-hour. Hence, during 24 hours, only 4–6 seconds of film were shot.<sup>42</sup>

The endless variation of flowering and fading plants, which during the 1930s more or less dominated the production of Mol's film company Multifilm, testifies to a peculiar obsession with cinematic techniques to measure the life of plants. *Van bol tot bloem/From Bulb to Flower* (1931) was ordered by the Haarlem tulip cultivators' organization, Het Centraal Bloembollencomité. An idyllic tulip-postcard counterpart to the Droste film mentioned earlier, this tinted documentary represents the spectacular mass cultivation and harvest of tulips and hyacinths. Variations of the tijdloupe motif are combined with more typical industry film shots of men and women in the fields sorting and packing bulbs and flowers.

Some of the trick-filmed sequences of *From Bulb to Flower* are recycled in *Het Wonder der Bloemen/The Miracle of Flowers* (1935). These two films approach cinema as a measuring device of natural processes (the flowers) and of artificial processes (industrial production and film production, respectively). In contrast to the tourist views and commercial publicity of *From Bulb to Flower*, *The Miracle of Flowers* offers a celebration of the flowering plant as screen attraction. Sequences of opening and closing flowers are interrupted by images of Mol himself as he (in true Vertov style) manipulates the exposure time or looks at film rushes. A 1935 version of *Time and the Film*, this film reveals the secrets of temporal manipulation and the accomplishment of film production.

With these examples in mind, we see how the pedagogical purpose of educational film makes room for a pure fascination with enchanted close-ups of flowers opening in approximate real-time. The scientist's gaze, marked by analytical distance and clinical scrutiny, seems replaced by a delight in buds, petals, stalks and pistils in vital motion. Moreover, these screen attractions seem loaded with erotic overtures, welcoming a Freudian interpretation and reminding us that the symbolic power of 'the figural' operates even in the screen cultures most differentiated from art film.

This is not to suggest that Mol's representation of flowers makes irrelevant or contradicts the educational purpose of explaining and visualizing botanic life. Rather, the close view of 'climbers seeking support', or the flowers of *Eremurus* which 'appear each at the right time and in the right place', appeal equally to the desire for knowledge and the aesthetic pleasure of the moving images as plastic form. Watching a flower of *Eremurus* sprout in a manipulated tempo is a fascinating study of metaphysical order and uncanny regularity that has nothing in common with the static presence of the flower in the field. Hence, in this sense, the experimental imagery offers a critique of the film image as mimetic representation and documentation of the real. We may learn something about the world, but the attraction of Mol's films consists of a world rendered unfamiliar and transformed into a screen event.

The tijdloupe and other devices inspired Mol to carry out abstractions of natural processes and to develop an educational use for the



space–time malleability of moving images. In turn, his microscopic views of crystals resulted in a structural minimalism, which, even compared with the work of Walter Ruttmann and Hans Richter, was extraordinarily radical in its questioning of the mimetic impulse of cinematic representation. In 1928, with the microcinematographic study *Uit het rijk der kristallen/From the Domain of Crystals*, Mol became a celebrated representative of absolute film. When this film was offered at the special screening organized by Abel Gance at the avant-garde theatre Studio 28 in Paris, the film was shown on an unusually large screen by three projectors running in synch.<sup>43</sup> This was *cinéma pur*, the avant-garde circle concluded, and, consequently, the film was also a great success later that year at the seventh Filmliga program in Amsterdam, where it was presented as ‘absolute film’. The following comment testifies to the enthusiastic reception of microcinematography as art:

We are convinced that his [Mol’s] experiments are very important in this transitional stage of the Filmliga, for all change that will liberate the cinema from the tyranny of the stars will have to start by studying the simple principles of what is seen, the movements registered by the camera-eye. The difference between ‘art film’ and ‘science film’, however useful otherwise, is not relevant in this case, as we are as yet unclear about where ‘art’ begins and ‘science’ ends.<sup>44</sup>

The film offers a twelve-minute study on crystals, combining a work on abstract rhythm with the transformation of crystals into microcosmic landscapes (see figures 1 and 5). Different from the screening of organic life in abstracted real-time, this microcinematographic framing of chemicals seems to express the moving image as pulse-beat and transformation of a plastic shape. A version of this film with an elaboration of form and colour, *Kristallen in kleur/Crystals in Colour* (1928), testifies to an even closer bond with the experiments of Ruttmann and other avant-garde filmmakers.<sup>45</sup>

Full attention is given to the cinematic exploration of texture and surface, and intertitles indicate merely the name of the represented substance. Hence, the visual attraction of this film goes beyond documentation in the sense of scientific gaze or epistemological desire. Through microcinematography, the magnified crystals become moving, organic patterns. Intertitles introduce ‘methylal’, ‘boric acid’, ‘calcium chlorate’, ‘sal-ammoniac’, ‘calium citrate’, ‘soda’, ‘asparagine’, ‘uranium nitrate’, ‘silver nitrate’ and ‘caffeine’, but the depicted substances seem provocatively alien to their names. The material referent suggested by, for example, ‘sal-ammoniac’ is subordinate to the purely visual pleasure of abstract form in constant change.

*From the Domain of Crystals* is ‘absolute’ because natural objects are perceived in a different manner from that which could be achieved by our eyes alone. Crystals become virtual landscapes that appeal to the imagination and desire of the viewer and there is also the pleasure of recognizing familiar shapes in abstract forms. Ice crystals in spectacular

<sup>43</sup> Hogenkamp and Kusters, *Een filmgrafisch en bibliografisch overzicht van zijn Nederlands Werk*, pp. 8–9.

<sup>44</sup> Quote from the Filmliga program at the Amsterdam Film Museum site: <http://www.polderdocumentaries.nl/eng/text/kristallen-eng.htm>. A tinted version of *From the Domain of Crystals* was probably used for the avant-garde screenings in Paris and Amsterdam.

<sup>45</sup> *Kristallen in kleur/Crystals in Colour* was part of a Filmliga retrospective at the Cinemateket in Stockholm in 1999.

**Figure 5**  
**Micro-cinematographic view of a**  
**chemical substance. *Uit het rijk***  
***der Kristallen/From the Domain of***  
***Crystals.* J. C. Mol, The**  
**Netherlands, 1928. Collection**  
**Nederlands Filmmuseum.**



bloom turn out to be boric acid, whereas wobbling rounds – a school of jellyfish perhaps – are really asparagine, and uranium nitrate approximates a desert sculpted by a storm. The radical imaging within this film consists of its rhythmic unfolding of abstract patterns, whereas the pedagogical ambition of this science film is reduced to a mere listing of names. Hence, exploring and exposing the border of the visible world, Mol accomplished a structural minimalism strongly aligned with avant-garde ideals of an embodied, visualized rhythm.

Throughout the history of cinema, attempts have been made to frame the frame of the camera eye, to measure a body's movement in space, or to reinvent the temporal extension of a natural event into abstract patterns. However, such projects of experimental filmmaking have been accomplished outside the field of avant-garde cinema. Experimental cinema has been defined by the modern observation that 'a different nature opens itself to the camera than to the naked eye'.<sup>46</sup> This is then informed by the aesthetic experience of nature in art, as it may be gracefully transformed by the artist 'and distilled into the canvas'.<sup>47</sup>

We commonly associate experimental cinema with the innovative achievements of individual film artists, whose images represent a programmatic alternative to mainstream cinema and the formal standards set by a commercial film industry. In experimental films, the craft of filmmaking takes on new meanings and provides conceptual tools (at times, even a theoretical framework) to explore the medium specificity of the moving image and related techniques of photographic representation. J. C. Mol's films offer illuminating examples of the practices and conceptions at the core of experimental cinema. His films from the 1920s and early 1930s respond directly to the historical framework outlined in this essay: the shared concern for visualized rhythm and space-time abstraction in the science film and in avant-garde cinema of this era. Mol celebrated the beauty of the natural world, but it would be more correct to say that his films transform the world into spectacular screen events.

<sup>46</sup> Benjamin, 'The work of art', p. 236.

<sup>47</sup> Llosa, *The Notebooks of Don Rigoberto*, p. 30.

Similar to the experimental work of Henri Chomette or Walter Ruttmann, Mol's films posit the aesthetic experience of cinema as a time-based medium. His educational ambition and experiments to extend camera techniques represent a film culture different from the predominant narrow equation of experimental cinema with avant-garde film. Anonymous illustrations for public lectures, microcinematographic experiments for the laboratory, publicity for chocolate and tulips, industrial films, whimsical examples of slow motion, obsessive views of opening flowers, and microscopic representations of crystals screened in avant-garde theatres – these form the radically different culture of Mol's film production.

The example of J. C. Mol reminds us that science filmmaking is part of the history of experimental cinema. These films result from inquiries into the technology and perception of moving images, and their experimental imagery pushes the limits of visual representation. Although the aesthetic of the films is usually subordinate to their depicted phenomena and the claims of the intertitles or voiceover, the educational aims of science film often meet with cinematic abstractions that appeal to the desire and imagination of the viewer. Mol's obsession with the natural world in cinematic transformation, rather than the natural world transcended, highlights an interesting aspect of experimental cinema. Space–time abstraction as avant-garde experiment and scientific project is an important addition to the film theories and manifestos from the 1920s. Within this varied context, amateur filmmakers, science lecturers, critics and artists recognize and celebrate the possibilities of an alternative optics through which the world is transformed, expanded and multiplied to the joy of the eye.

This article results from two months of research in Amsterdam and Utrecht during the spring of 2004. I am very grateful to the Swedish Foundation for International Cooperation in Research and Higher Education for a stipend and to Professor Frank Kessler who kindly invited me to Utrecht University and the Instituut Media en Representatie, Film- en Televisiewetenschap. I would also like to thank the very helpful and encouraging staff at the Amsterdam Film Museum.

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# Screen

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Micro-cinematographic view of a chemical substance from *Uit het rijk der Kristallen/From the Domain of Crystals* (Mol, 1928). Collection Nederlands Filmmuseum.

# Archive aesthetics and the historical imaginary: *Wisconsin Death Trip*

JOHN CORNER

History on film and television varies in the extent and manner to which it is organized as a kind of chair-based travel, a virtual journey in which alignments of past and present (for example, the bad past, the great past, the past as surprisingly like today, the past as surprisingly unlike it) are configured and made subject to assessment.

In this article, I want to look at how one historical film organizes its historical journey, explicitly referred to as a ‘trip’ in its title, at the relations of space and time it generates and at the very distinctive forms of the visual that it uses at the core of its portrayal. I also want to explore briefly how a number of newspaper and website critics assessed the film in different and sometimes conflicting ways. Here, I shall draw mostly on the extensive reviews of the cinematic release in the USA rather than the more limited critical attention given to the television screening in Britain. A review of the non-academic critical assessment of documentary films and programmes seems to me to be well worth including in scholarship, as a way into a broader sense of a work’s public meanings and their articulation with existing configurations of value, and I hope my practice here bears this view out.

Many of my concerns will relate indirectly to issues of *genre*, since my example raises questions about the kind of positioning with the discursive space of ‘documentary’ it wishes to take up and the range of broader aesthetic interconnections it wants to exploit. ‘Documentary’ has always been a dispersed genre, sometimes to the point of having its very categorial existence questioned, and a sharper exploration of its generic characteristics and its multiple points of overlap with other modes of portrayal has been a feature of much recent scholarship.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The example of Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994) has been an international influence here.

2 The DVD contains a commentary in which Marsh and Bryld make several observations further to those on the website about the aesthetic design of the project and the techniques employed to achieve it. I have cited some of these at points in the article.

3 The historical integrity of Lesy's book has been an issue of much dispute in its own right. See, for instance, the discussion in C. Zoe Smith 'The questionable use of 19<sup>th</sup> century photographs in visual research: Wisconsin Death Trip as case study', *The Journal of Visual Literacy*, vol. 18, no.1 (1998), pp. 47–60.

*Wisconsin Death Trip* (henceforth *WDT*) is a film by British writer/director James Marsh. Made in 1999 for the BBC and Cinemax, it draws extensively on a book of the same name written by Michael Lesy and published by the University of New Mexico Press in 1973. It received cinema exhibition on both sides of the Atlantic, including at film festivals, as well as being shown in the BBC *Arena* (arts documentary) slot in July 2000. In 2004, it was released on DVD by Tartan Video.<sup>2</sup>

The focus of both the book and the film is life, but more often death, in the Wisconsin town of Black River Falls during the last decade of the nineteenth century. The core structure of both involves a sequence of short local newspaper stories combined with photographs from an extensive and neglected archive discovered in the town by Michael Lesy while exploring aspects of regional history. The book was a work of record but also a work of mood. Its catalogue of often dark and bizarre incidents, occurring within a strongly established sense of historical period and of topographical space, projected a sense of the random, the 'freakish', that allowed the curio values, the impact of the engagingly grotesque, to come through uncomplicated by too many questions of context and causality.<sup>3</sup> Marsh's film (shot largely in monochrome) continued and further developed this particular inflection. Its adaptation of text and photograph to voice, film sequence and musical score took the project into new aesthetic spaces. As well as combining elements of historical record and of visual pleasure, the film also develops the self-conscious interest in the odd and the bizarre. This allows a rich depictive styling at the same time as it gives a degree of instability to the project and, as I shall suggest, finally raises some problems for interpretation.

The organization of the material in the film (running at just over 70 minutes in its television version) is essentially seasonal. Newspaper accounts from different, unspecified years across the 1890s are read out over both original archive photography and newly shot dramatized sequences, combined and presented within the framing of the four seasons. The cycle starts with winter and runs through back to winter again, which is given a further, final treatment before a 'literary' closure involving a full repetition of the opening commentary (see below), now spoken over shots of present-day Black River Falls. In each season, something like eight to twelve separate accounts of local events are both provided orally and illustrated either by photographs or film sequences. These accounts are previewed by inter-title captions (which of course echo the form of early cinema and fit in with the absence of colour from most of the material). The intertitles offer brief, phrasal indications of the incidents that will be portrayed in what follows (for example, for spring: 'Trouble with young people ... drug taking, arson and lovelorn suicides ... curious superstitions amongst the Norwegians and a terrible murder leads to a manhunt').

Such a broad cyclic system, providing a frame that reduces the requirement for any firmer expository design, helps to disembody the material from its specifically historical settings. The narrative elements develop an impressionistic and even at times hallucinatory character – in

4 See my further comments on this central tension both in documentary organization and documentary viewing, in John Corner 'Television, documentary and the category of the aesthetic', *Screen*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2003), pp. 92–100.

the process reinforcing a sense of place as well as of time (indeed, place seen repeatedly *over* time). We see the rivers, trees, fields and farms as well as the streets and houses of a rural community under the changing conditions of sunlight, shadow, night, snow, rain, mud and surrounding seasonal shifts in the landscape. These changes cue broad shifts of mood, particularly in conjunction with a musical score that is given a strong role in the whole communicative organization. This organization produces the relaxed, expansive movement of the film, giving the viewer ample time to look at the images and engage fully with the terms of the verbal account. Such a movement is part of the film's economy of information, but it is also very much part of its aesthetic economy. The approach has the confidence of 'Art' discourse in the extent to which it offers many of its images as ones to be *looked at* as well as *through*, an invitation which, again, pulls them further away from their socio-historical contingency at the same time as it helps deepen their impact, a tension to which I want to return.<sup>4</sup> At the end of each season, portrayal of the past is exchanged for brief scenes and speech from contemporary Black River Falls, shot in colour. These shorter sequences are also composed and paced in accordance with the broad aesthetic design (music controlling mood and pace, slowed motion, tracking shots, an expansive pictorialism). In them, the grimmer side of life in modern Black River Falls, including murders, arson and drug-related crime, is brought out alongside elements which suggest a friendly community in a beautiful natural setting. Inevitably, these sections of 'now' open up perspectives of comparison and of judgement with 'then'.

The film develops its historical account as a 'dark portrait' – a pathology of place. As I noted, crucial to the effect both of the book and the film is the character of the newspaper accounts selected. Among a broader range of reports following the calendar of town life through its more routine events, there is an emphasis on disease, madness and crime, particularly murder. For instance, in the 'Spring' segment, the 'terrible tragedy' of two boys who kill a farmer and then stay in his farm to play as outlaws, leading to one of them then being hunted and finally arrested by a posse, is divided across several scenes, interwoven with other material. In each of the sections, the figure of Mary Sweeney appears (see figure 1), a smartly dressed young woman given to bouts of window-smashing and at last committed to the local asylum, where she is finally seen pacing restlessly around in her locked room. Among the questions raised by the film are ones about how far the 'darkness' of the account emerges as a secondary effect from a narrative primarily committed to revealing uncomfortable historical truths or how far the aesthetic and affective project itself is primary, the selection and organization of historical data being largely the means to its end. These are questions of a kind similar to those raised about the book but the film's dramatizations give them sharper emphasis.

I am suggesting that *WDT* works with a distinctive approach to conveying viewers into history. This depends on the fashioning of a strong 'archival aesthetics' around the *records* of the past. The specific



5 I am using the term in the broad sense of an engagement with the historical within which imaginative constructions, serving different aesthetic and ideological ends, are primary elements. Historical fiction foregrounds these constructions, but they are often powerfully present in purportedly factual accounts too, sometimes in a crossover from the fictions. See Thomas Elsaesser's use of the notion in his exploration of German cinema, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (London: Routledge, 2000).

6 The voice is that of the English actor Ian Holm (the newspaper editor was English), but the mute physical portrayal is by someone else.

forms of the historical imaginary generated by the film are a consequence. The production of an historical imaginary is a consequence both of the beguilingly unknowable nature of past specificity and of its attractions both as an object world (a site for historical knowledge but also the resources for historical fetishism) and as subjective space (the site for the reconstruction of historical experience and feeling and for the play of historical fantasy).<sup>5</sup> In exploring this strategy further, I want first of all to look more closely at the film's project of *animation*, its interest in bringing newspaper text and old photographs alive.

For many documentary ventures, a key challenge has been the 'animation' of material where the possibilities of continuous action footage or live speech are limited. Directors since Grierson have known the benefits of being able to offer a 'living story' and have resorted to various kinds of device in order to secure an appropriate degree of narrative vivacity in their productions. History projects, given the frequent limitations of primary visual evidence and detailed primary data of any kind, confront this challenge in a way that has led to a very wide range of ingenuity, sometimes controversial in its license. How does *WDT* use voice, image and music to effect its translation from newspaper text and photograph, to create its embodiment of 'the record'?

### Voice

Many historical films and television programmes set up a direct relationship between past and present by having a presenter voice (commentary or direct to camera or both) located in the present. It is this present voice that guides our journey through the past and regulates, lightly or otherwise, our experience of it in terms both of knowledge and judgement. Our virtual experience of 'then', even in the strongly imaginary form of re-enactment, is thus framed by a knowing 'now'. *WDT*'s time travel breaks with this in having as our guide to the images of 'then' a voice from 'then'. Marsh's script takes extracts from the old newspaper texts of Lesy's book and dramatizes them by having them spoken as narration by a voice performing that of the local newspaper editor who first published them in the 1890s, Frank Cooper.<sup>6</sup> Established visually in his office, Cooper is regularly seen, in shots of his face and his typewriter keyboard, preparing the baldly descriptive reports that his narration offers. The spoken reports run across the images of their composition and then across the still and moving representation of what is reported, routing us through the film's combination of archive and newly shot materials. What might appear at other points simply to be spoken commentary is inflected by the sequences of keyboard composition into a more internalized mode, a mode of thought and of creative crafting. The voice of the past is portrayed dramatically, as thinking becoming typescript, and what the speech refers to is not directly the image track as perceived by the audience but the barest details of the incidents themselves, of which the images are variously

recorded or re-constructed portrayals. This is therefore not a conventional documentary commentary, self-conscious about its duties as a guide to what is being shown. The voice is essentially the thinking aloud of a message addressed via the keyboard to the readers of the newspaper in the past, not to the audience of the film in the present. As viewers, we are put in a position where we ‘overhear’ inner speech becoming public discourse and use it as a guide to reading the images. A further consequence of this general approach is to provide the film with an historically sourced and embodied voice that is, nevertheless, articulating prose rather than colloquial speech. It has a tone, a range of inflection (including the amused and the supercilious), and a measured delivery of the basic, ‘matter-of-fact’ details of each occurrence that gives an aural density to the aesthetic design as a whole. Through its very mode of delivery, it also gives our connections with history the added depth of past consciousness, not just a replication of past appearance and a reading of past description.

### Image

The core visual aesthetic of *WDT* is provided by the photographs from the collection discovered by Lesy – the work of the local photographer Charles Van Schaick. These still moments of witness from the history of Black River Falls, often showing posed groups (see figure 2), serve as a template for the general mode of representation. On the film’s website, Marsh talks of their impact upon him when he first looked at the book: ‘as you read it, the photographs begin to resemble these weird apparitions from the past, staring right into your eyes’. On the DVD commentary, he comments further on their degree of detachedness, seeing the faces as ‘blank canvases’ while his Danish director of photography Eigil Bryld, in a remark that is illuminating for the film’s overall strategy, sees them as producing a ‘vacuum that sucks you in’. Bryld notes on the website his own interest in the replicatory dimension of the enterprise:

The photographs – and the challenge of replicating their look in live-action sequences – is what drew me to the project. We ended up doing some fairly unusual and reckless things whilst shooting which mercifully paid off. More than any other film I’ve shot, this film is completely driven by its visuals and, of course, that shifts more responsibility on to the DP but is also more rewarding.<sup>7</sup>

Marsh himself adds to this comment:

Our principal influences were still images from the early history of photography – notably Lewis Hine and André Kertész – you can learn everything you need to know about black and white composition from those two masters.<sup>8</sup>

Working from this base, shooting on super 16 and using exposure settings and then digital enhancement to get the archive ‘look’ (of an

<sup>7</sup> [Http://www.wisconsindearthrip.com/reviews.html](http://www.wisconsindearthrip.com/reviews.html) (accessed October 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

image produced by a glass plate negative) and to provide firmly defined compositions high in monochromatic tonal values, Marsh and Bryld created a visual track consisting of a series of short tableaux or vignettes. Both talk of seeking a 'rostrum camera effect', involving holding the frame and slow focus pulling, even in action sequences. Each sequence was linked with various degrees of directness to the spoken newspaper accounts, with many incorporating the original photographic material as well as regular re-enactments of Frank Cooper working at his newspaper desk. Locally recruited and mostly non-professional actors were employed in shooting the scenes, to provide further still images as well as narrative segments. The 'trip' thus constructs its opportunities of seeing largely in relation to its telling, the spoken accounts providing the documentary basis for reading both the archive photographs and the new material. In a manner akin to the way Barthes viewed the functioning of captions in newspaper photography, the images are the core of the portrayal but their signifiatory power (including here, access to the historicity of what they show) is regulated by words.<sup>9</sup>

In a further connection both with photographic work and with early film, the material portraying the 1890s is without dialogue. Apart from the accounts of Cooper, these sequences are presented without human sound, with the exception of one or two points where crying is heard or where the diary of someone declared insane is spoken 'in character' as voice-over.

I noted earlier that the effect of this commitment to a photographic aesthetic is to open up for the viewer a much more extensive opportunity for contemplating the image than is usually the case in historical documentary.<sup>10</sup> Even the dramatic sequences often unfold at a pace that does not disturb this basic mode of viewing, which we can see as involving a heightened *pictorialism*, attained through both the form of composition and through duration (on the DVD commentary, the director talks of his wish to give a strong sense of 'time passing'). Of key importance in allowing this approach to work is the use throughout of a musical score.

## Music

Music helps both in the control of the pace and the mood of *WDT*. Bringing together a number of different themes, drawing on a variety of vernacular music, it ranges between a subdued background toning and a strongly foregrounded, even dramatic, immediacy, saturating the screen with its urgency. It cues feelings around the photographs and helps build the energy of action sequences. As so often in factual film, it performs both a formal and thematic role. Formally, it gives continuity and a degree of coherence to diverse materials, providing a segue between original photograph and reconstruction and between the different newspaper accounts as well as providing 'punctuation' where appropriate. This is a function with a long precedent in archive-based film. Thematically, it connotes both place and period through its use of traditional musical forms (for example, Blind Lemon Jefferson) together

9 The ideas of 'anchorage' and 'relay' are the key notions here, appearing in a number of Barthes's writings including *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977).

10 For a discussion of the contemplative opportunities provided by the still image and rostrum camera, see Karen Lury, *Interpreting Television* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 31–2. Lury comments both on the increase in knowledge that the image may provide in this mode, but also on intensified affective engagement, the two not necessarily in alignment and perhaps in contradiction. Barthes's elegiac reflections on photographs as essentially bits of dead reality are, of course, particularly relevant to the project of this film. See Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (London: Fontana, 1984).

with echoes of the American orchestral canon and other material both old and new (for example, Debussy and John Cale). At the same time, it articulates moods appropriate to what is seen and heard. In the absence of dialogue, it provides the communicative context within which the combination of commentary and pictures can sustain a full significance. It engages the viewer emotionally and precludes the awkward minimalism that might follow for many audiences in attending to a screen in which images were regularly left silent for longer than in most conventional practice. Allied to a visual aesthetic that trades on duration, it reduces the risks of communicative breakdown by keeping the experience aurally 'full'.

To analyze the way the film works as a viewing experience requires that we look more closely at its local organization and movement. I propose to do this by examining two scenes in some detail. First of all, I will look at the quite lengthy opening sequence (3 minutes, 50 seconds) as it moves through to the main title. Embedded here are indications of what is to come both by way of portrayal and our expected relationship to this. I shall keep the descriptions themselves relatively free of critical interpretation to allow the clearest sense of precisely what is shown.

### **'Then'**

The film opens with a sequence of three captions on black background. A slow piano melody is heard, and then a cello joins it, providing a more sombre texture. The first captions reads:

*What follows is based on real events that took place in the State of Wisconsin between 1890 and 1900.*

The second reads:

*All the stories are authentic news reports from a newspaper published in the town of Black River Falls – an isolated community in the north of the state.*

We now see monochrome shots of a river glistening in the sun, with rock bluffs opposite and wooded banks (figure 3). The movement is slowly across the river and then along the banks, following the outline of the bluffs. The music continues. The third caption appears:

*The newspaper was the paper of record for the surrounding county and was edited by an Englishman called Frank Cooper*

We see in close-up the fingers of a typist on a keyboard, followed by a medium close-up of a large camera with a bowler hat covering the lens. The hat is removed. The fourth caption on black comes up:

*The Photography is largely the work of Charles Van Schaick, a professional photographer who lived in Black River Falls in the 1890s.*

There then follows a series of intermixed short sequences and photographs, each held for about 6–12 seconds. Briefly, these are:

1. A shot of a large cave mouth looking out on to the river and the opposite bank, taken from inside the cave and with two young girls dressed as for a Sunday picnic framed in its entrance (figure 4).
2. A return to the typewriter keyboard (figure 5) and then a shot of the face of a bearded and bespectacled man typing.
3. A photograph of a woman on a wooden sidewalk alongside a dirt main street bordered by buildings. She is wearing full skirts, has on a large hat and is carrying an umbrella.
4. A photograph of a large white horse standing on an earth road, with a long flowing mane reaching to the ground. A man in a bowler hat is in the background.
5. Two photographs of family groups posing before the camera outside houses (one clearly a log cabin). Both groups are simply dressed, and one of the men carries crutches (figure 6).
6. A photograph of native Americans posing in full tribal dress with a forest background.
7. A photograph of two native Americans in dark jackets, seated and drinking alcohol. The man on the left looks down to write, the woman on the right looks at the camera.
8. Two photographs of native American children in ragged clothing with disease-scarred faces. They are looking direct to camera. The second image is in medium close-up (figure 7).
9. Photographs of the river bank and bluffs. A canoe pushes out from the shore watched by people on the bank. They are dressed formally ('Sunday best').
10. Two photographs of hunting in the woods. In one, children shouldering guns carry between them a dead rabbit tied to a pole. In the other, a crouching man shoots a deer, the smoke of the shot clearly visible.
11. A sequence of a train arriving in a station at night, moving left to right.

Across this visual sequence, the following is spoken by the actor providing the voice of Frank Cooper:

We can say honestly that we know of few states or cities that offer the advantages of those enjoyed by Wisconsin and Black River Falls. Our city was founded in 1864 and soon attracted industrious settlers from Norway, Germany and other countries of the European continent. The Winebago Indians, who are native to the region, never made any trouble worthy of mention to the white settlers. Some years ago, they were encouraged to leave for settlements in the West, but many of them returned to live in bands round the county, where they remain largely hidden away. [the speech continues across the images, remarking on hunting and the arrival of the railway] . . . When

considering all these advantages, it is safe to assume that nowhere in the length and breadth of this great continent of ours can be found a more desirable residence than Black River Falls.

This speech finishes with a shot of hands on the typewriter again and a return to the shots of the river and the bluffs, as taken from a moving boat. There then follows:

12. A loud bang as a flash powder rod goes off above a tripod camera. Smoke rises. Only the photographer's arms are visible, he raises his left arm to replace a hat over the lens (figure 8).
13. A young girl with her eyes closed, seen laying full length on a sofa, in her 'best clothes'.
14. The child from another angle. A man's shoes are seen. The child is carried across the room from the sofa to a coffin and laid within it.
15. A close-up of the pale face of the child in the coffin (figure 9).
16. A decorated coffin lid is placed over her and closed.
17. The titles 'Wisconsin Death Trip' over the image (as metal type in a newspaper headline type-box).

After a fade, the film proper begins with just the noise of the wind and a drifting shot that slowly takes us underneath the bough of a tree from which a bare-footed man hangs by his neck from a noose (figure 10). We see a newspaper headline being printed on a manual press, with the music returning in harsher, plangent vein – 'Winter Hits Town Hard'.

What is the effect of this pre-title combination of writing, speech, image and music? First of all, eschewing the firm framing that would be provided by a commentary from the present, the film establishes its grounding in the historical world and in record by drawing us into the historical rather than 'placing' it for us. The captions are from the present, however, and they claim for the film the 'real' and the 'authentic' from their exterior positions of valorization. The film is not allowed to be entirely self-validating; it is given a written warrant of approval. Despite the authenticity claimed in the captions, however, the 'based on' clause is prudent given the degree of dramatic license necessarily exercised in the detailed dramatization of many of the stories. The emphasis on topography is firmly established. The movement across the glistening river towards, and then around, the rock bluffs, almost mesmerically slow (on the DVD commentary, Marsh talks of the 'dreamy' effect he sought here) and accompanied by music, is liminal, an entry into the historical world of the film, psychological as much as physical. We are then introduced to the features and voice of the person who will guide us on our historical journey. His comments set the background for what will follow and act as forms of spoken caption to the visual sequences, but they also play more than a descriptive role. The matter-of-fact references to the native Americans who 'never made any trouble worthy of mention' and who 'remain largely hidden away' sound a disturbing note of exclusion and marginality, embedded as they are in



**Fig. 1**



**Fig. 2**



**Fig. 3**



**Fig. 4**



**Fig. 5**



**Fig. 6**



**Fig. 7**



**Fig. 8**



**Fig. 9**



**Fig. 10**

**Figures 1–10**  
**'Then'.**

**Scenes from a troubled history**

sentences celebrating community. The claims made for the desirability of Black River Falls already not only appear to be subject to comic levels of exaggeration but also to carry ironic potential, as if the film is already setting up the town for a darker, undercutting interpretation.



<sup>11</sup> When archive photographs are used within an historical film, there is likely to be a 'secondary discourse' effect whereby their own discursive contingency becomes less open to interrogation as they are reduced to being deployed resources rather than independent artefacts, privileging issues of use over those of their primary integrity.

<sup>12</sup> L. P. Hartley, the opening lines of *The Go-Between* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953).

The old photographs underneath the speech, in combination with the excerpted accounts, project an authenticity of record upon which the film can ground itself. Expanded by the new material, they offer a visual plane for contemplating historical circumstance and the densities of its strangeness. Their mode of use does not encourage questioning as to their own status as indicators of historical truth.<sup>11</sup> They have the detail and the fascination of a past that, even for Americans viewing the film, is always, 'another country' where 'they do things differently', even though identified continuities with the present provide part of the appeal of the differences.<sup>12</sup> After the spoken introduction has finished, however, the film resorts to shock in shifting quickly towards the more macabre and bizarre. What is going on in showing us the photographing of the dead child? (A sequence built around the contemporary fashion for 'memorial photography'.) What does this juxtaposition of pretty young face and coffin convey to us about the film's themes and approach? As we then glide silently underneath the tree branch and towards the hanging corpse, the terms of the film's own movement – compositionally self-aware, spacious, relaxed, cool – become more apparent, as does its interest in animating the historical through a structure of feeling weighted towards the *grotesque*.

### 'Now'

I have noted how the four short sequences of Black River Falls in 1999 are put into contrast and comparison with the circumstances a century earlier. It is worth looking at how the first of these sequences is organized, the one placed before the 'Spring' segment of historical accounts. Its principal elements are as follows:

1. A country road with woods. A cyclist passes left to right in a fixed frame shot; there is snow on the ground (figure 11). Slow piano music.
2. 'Black River Falls' town sign.
3. A drifting, travelling shot down a street of tidy and well-appointed clapboard houses (figure 12). Music continues. Local radio announcer voice-over. He gives the weather forecast. 'Now a look at today's forecast. Spring really is in the air. Expect partly sunny skies today with a chance of some afternoon showers.'
4. Children playing on lawns, around sprinklers. Music continues.
5. More shots of houses and children playing. A girl's voice telling that her great grandfather was a lumberjack.
6. A woodland track. A man's voice telling how salespeople sold land to settlers that was really worthless.
7. More shots of houses and streets. A woman comments that many of the Norwegians were hoping for a new chance when they came to the town. Music continues.
8. Central street in the town. A middle-aged man in shirtsleeves addresses the camera. 'I'm Lewis Perry, mayor of Black River Falls, Wisconsin, population 3700. Also the County Court House is located

in Black River Falls as it's our County seat. This is a real friendly town and a wonderful place to raise children.'

9. A slow pass down a long line of children facing the camera in a playground, most wearing Halloween-style horror costumes – monsters, zombies, witches (figure 13). Music resumes.

Transported into the present, the viewer reads the portrayal of Black River Falls alert to messages about continuity and change. There is a sense of sunny well-being and prosperity, of small town charm, on offer. The Mayor's piece of direct-to-camera publicity supports such a view at the same time as its very explicitness serves to remind the viewer of the earlier remarks of the newspaper editor about the advantages and unique desirability of the place, remarks which the film has now substantially undercut. The final shots of children dressed for a party in their 'horror' outfits is clearly meant to provide a visual disturbance of the sunny view and a connection back to the grim historical record which the 'Winter' sequence has already established. The formal activity at work here, as the critic Michael Eaton perceptively notes, has some connection with the work of David Lynch (those pretty clapboard houses and white fences echo the opening shots of *Blue Velvet* [1986], as does the latently ironic form of their steady apprehension by the camera).<sup>13</sup> In a similar manner, the way in which the portrayal of the children connects to the kind of visual rhetoric of the 'disturbing' and of the pathological found in the photographic work, for instance, of Richard Avedon and Diane Arbus (the latter an influence acknowledged by the director on the DVD commentary) has also to be reckoned with. The line of children displaying themselves for the camera's drifting gaze in their varieties of spooky costume certainly shows a decisive departure from any terms of naturalistic reportage.

13 Michael Eaton, 'Vanishing Americans', *Sight and Sound*, (6 June 2000), pp. 30–2. On the DVD commentary, Marsh agrees that Lynch's work was an influence. He also notes the way in which Dziga Vertov and Chris Marker, particularly the latter's development of a narrative around stills in *La Jetée* (1962), informed his approach. Among many other filmic influences, that of the Coen Brothers is worth mentioning too, particularly their work in *Fargo* (1996).



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



Fig. 13

Figures 11–13  
'Now'.  
Sunshine and ambiguity

What does the 'trip' tell us about the 1890s and what kind of judgements does it encourage us to make in our movements between then and now? The 'now' sections are progressively darker in their toning, mixing elements of crime and infirmity more strongly as we move through the seasons. A 'now' sequence on 'Winter', towards the end of the film, has footage in an old people's home and includes voiced-over interview comments about death and the spirit world. It ends with a shot of a funeral parlour. Despite this, the final, short sequence from 'now', which closes the film and which has the opening commentary repeated across its images, mixes slow motion shots of a rodeo, a parade on the main street, a church service and a casino, all without any clear, summary judgement.

Nevertheless, across both historical and present-day material, it is a sense of the continuities that seems to be primarily at work. The film's determined undercutting of any romantic, sentimental framing of pioneer life is combined, perhaps awkwardly, with a reluctance to celebrate the present. The sunny side of Black River Falls today is offset not only in the ironic manner of its portrayal but also by the inclusion of other items within the inventory – crimes and suicide. However, the present-day town offers nothing like the catalogue of murder and despair that dominates the 1890s accounts. Despite the film's attempt to nudge our perception of the town today in this 'remarkable' direction by various voiced-over fragments of selected local news (for example, a human head found in a garbage bag; a child murder), the overall level of social disruption here does not seem to exceed that which we might think is to be expected in a community of this size.

If reading Black River Falls now becomes something of a problem for the film's final coherence, reading it 'then' still poses the difficulty of judging the degree of historical/archival representativeness, or alternatively of authorial pre-theming, at work. The broader question here concerns the extent to which the film is to be regarded as an historical documentary and the extent to which it is to be seen primarily as an 'art project', its selection of instances and its organization and portrayal of them governed by a narrative and affective ambition more closely aligned to that of fiction. The steady accumulation of 'bad' incidents, often carrying in their manner of depiction (as in the appearances of Mary Sweeney, the window-smasher) an element of the bizarre and even of the *comic*, with implications for the whole mood of viewing, displaces the narrative from any conventional attempt at historiographic representativeness. Together with the strong stylizations of the depiction, it points to the selectivity, perhaps radical, of what is being presented. This is particularly so given the film's almost total lack of interest in broader issues of context and cause. Anchored to the newspaper's localized accounts, which take each instance as a discrete event and only occasionally point to larger shifts in the town's fortunes, *WDT* is effectively confined to a non-explanatory history. Working with its tight selectivity from the full run of weekly newspaper stories across a

14 The *Newsday* review (Gene Seymour) is dated 1 December 1999. The *New York Times* has two notices, one (Sunday feature, Greil Marcus) is on 28 November 1999 and the other (film review) is dated 1 December 1999. All three can be read at <http://www.wisconsindeathtrip.com/reviews.html>. The *Chicago Tribune* review (Michael Wilmington) is dated 30 November 2001, the *St Pauls Pioneer Press* review (Chris Hewitt) is dated 25 January 2002 and the *San Francisco Chronicle* review (Edward Guthmann) is dated 2 January 2002. They can be read on the film review website, <http://www.rottentomatoes.com>. The online reviews from *Box Office Magazine* (undated, Tim Cogshell) and from <http://www.aboutfilm.com> (April 2000, Jeff Vorndam) can be read through the archive search on their respective websites (<http://www.boxoffice.com> and <http://www.aboutfilm.com>). Michael Eaton's lengthy review can be read in full at [http://www.bfi.org/sightandsound/2000\\_06/vanishing.html](http://www.bfi.org/sightandsound/2000_06/vanishing.html) (all sites accessed October 2004).

decade and its own aesthetic preferences, it produces a 'pathological' account in which any sense of cause remains largely internal to the individuals depicted, going beyond this only to imply a psychosis of the town itself. Whether the town's identity is the unlucky product of its more unfortunate citizens or vice versa is left unresolved, while any larger economic and social factors are marginalized. 'Mad People in a Mad Town' might be the reductionist judgement here, and some critical opinion struck precisely this note.

Scholarship on film, and particularly on factual genres, is guilty of paying too little attention to readings generated outside of the sphere of academic commentary, to the wider range of critical opinion. Quite frequently, this 'review opinion' shows a dispute not only about quality and worth but also about *how the film works* and even about *what it says*. It highlights questions both about intention and practice, variously offering its assessments as categoric truths or as partly the subjective products of its own interpretations.

A key point of division between critical accounts of *WDT* was on the question of how far the specific time and place to which it conveyed its viewers was exotic and strange, a land of 'distant others', or on the contrary, in surprising alignment with our sense of society today.<sup>14</sup> *Newsdays'* review headline 'It's a mad, mad Wisconsin' and that of the *New York Times* review 'How a town in Wisconsin went mad' perfectly capture the former view, in which both the idea of a sick place and an essentially biographical/psychological reading of the history are dominant. A more general comment in the same vein comes from the *Chicago Tribune*, 'a twisted piece of Americana that stays in the mind' and from *St Paul Pioneer Press*, 'a stunning catalog of cheesehead mayhem'. Pulling the other way would be comments like those of Edward Guthmann in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, who noted that 'we see how much we have in common with our forebears' and *Boxoffice Magazine*, whose cautious review concluded that 'much of what the film documents could come from today's headlines' and, in a phrasing that partly accommodates both exotic and realist readings, 'it's creepy, but proves that there is indeed nothing new under the sun'.

Just how far the film's aesthetic transformations interfered with attempts at a conventional documentary reading, and with judgements of value, came through in a number of accounts. In the shrewd, contextualizing review for *Sight and Sound* referred to above, Michael Eaton noted how the project differed from that of the book, suggesting its tendency away from a broader suggestiveness towards localized oddity – 'It is now far easier to view Black River Falls as an aberrant gothic liminal zone rather than as a cracked synecdoche for the whole of the Union.'

Many critics registered the 'unrelenting strangeness' of the portrayal (*Newsday*), some picking up critically on what the *New York Times* saw as the 'aura of sardonic hippie nonchalance' at work in the treatment as a whole. More comprehensively, the film was connected to the work of

fantasist film directors like Tim Burton, with the aesthetics of *Sleepy Hollow* (1999) seen to be there in the background.

Yet although there was disagreement about the degree and kind of historiographic purpose at work, the impact of the film's originality of design and competence of execution was also recognized. Greil Marcus in the *New York Times* 'Sunday feature' noted how it produced 'a series of incidents that hang in the memory like half-remembered dreams: true, undeniable, but unbidden and incomplete'. This is part of a generally appreciative account of the film, even if one in which a 'sense of insulation, of a world in suspension' is registered as a complicating factor in making an historical assessment from it. However, a few critics read the strong foregrounding of the style negatively, as in the blunt verdict of Jeff Vorndam (aboutfilm.com) 'a coolly expressive joke with scant insight'.

*WDT* combines some of the elements of the historical documentary with some of the attractions of a journey primarily for pleasure and for the fascinations of portrayal itself. In the mode of viewing appropriate to the first of these, the engagement is closely referential, the images are read for what they tell us about the past through an interpretative process that works by cumulative inference in the absence of any explicit historiographic argument. In the mode of viewing appropriate to the second, the images are read in a way that does not preclude referential engagement but privileges a satisfaction drawing extensively from the play of the representation itself and its formal, affective impact within an overall textual design embracing the allure of the weird. The promotional text on the box of the DVD version of the film, 'incredible, shocking, bizarre, true' emphasizes this appeal, whilst being careful to bring it into a clinching combination with historical fact.

By an almost total reliance on monologue speech drawn from the period being depicted, presented as an interior, compositional discourse aligned to, but not designed to *explain*, the episodic flow of images, the film both increases 'immersion' in the period at the same time as it refuses any vantage point from which expository coherence might be attempted. It is not surprising that the inclusion of sequences from present-day Black River Falls is so often regarded critically in reviews of the film. They generate around themselves a more mundane, sociological space, familiar from mainstream documentary work. This is both more literal and more contingent in its connections. It *requires* to be read for its significance in relation to the disturbing history. This trip may seem to suggest the strange, the completely 'other', these sequences appear to say, but actually the real, underlying story is one of resemblance. As I have noted, however, this is an awkward reading to sustain, undercut by the mismatch in the sheer scale and kind of bad incident to which parallel reference can be made. Continuity of place does not convincingly become continuity of circumstance, despite the points of connection across the 100 year gap.

15 Examples of work with a firmer historiographic design would include the wide range of recent presenter-led series, exemplified in Britain by the highly successful *A History of Britain* (BBC, 2002), fronted by historian Simon Schama. See David Cannadine (ed.), *History and the Media* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) for several essays on developments in TV history and John Corner, 'Backward looks: mediating the past', *Media, Culture and Society*, vol. 28, no. 3 (2006), pp. 466–72 for a review of the issues raised.

*WDT* provides an interesting case of the combination of documentary structures and markedly original aesthetic ambition in relation to an historical topic. Its commitments to what I have termed an archive aesthetics and to the localized bizarre takes it past the point at which documentaries organized with a firmer historiographic brief would feel obliged to hold back.<sup>15</sup> *WDT* deploys its formal confidence in ways that fascinate, provoke (and sometimes annoy) in the same measure that they refuse to instruct.

I would like to thank Maureen Ryan and Hands On Productions for generously allowing me to use images from the production.

# Telling and retelling in the 'Ink of Light': documentary cinema, oral narratives, and indigenous identities

JOANNA HEARNE

In the contested arena of Native American image studies, many contemporary indigenous viewers and filmmakers have redirected, via narration, the meaning of the anterior referent or the 'real' in early photography and film. For example, the turn-of-the-century photograph on the following page by Edward S. Curtis, 'The Three Chiefs – Piegan', follows the pictorialist tradition in its intensely expressive composition (figure 1). The use of longshot, the stance of the men, their blurred reflections in a waterhole and the wide horizon isolate the central figures, separating them from their community context, while suggesting (in the caption as well as the image) a clichéd nobility. Yet for Blackfoot filmmaker George Burdeau, the image had a very different effect, bringing him back to his own tribal community: 'When I first discovered Curtis, I found this photograph of three Piegan chiefs out on the plains and I still hadn't come home yet, so for me, this was like – coming home . . . it allowed me to go on my own journey, and I knew that . . . I needed to come home.'<sup>1</sup> If images tell stories, stories just as importantly frame and translate images for the viewer, infusing them with a specifically narrative meaning. Revising both the Euro-American melodramatic narratives of 'vanishing' Indians and contemporary scholarly criticism of stereotyping in early film and photography, contemporary indigenous films bring the stasis of ethnographic portraiture into the private sphere of intergenerational relationships.

Early ethnographic cinema combined documentation with the exotic, seeking to capture a supposed Native 'purity' while using

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in the film *Coming to Light: Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indians* (Anne Makepeace, 2000).



**Figure 1**  
**'The Three Chiefs – Piegan.'**  
 Edward S. Curtis. Portfolio 6, plate  
 no. 209, 1900. McCormick Library  
 of Special Collections,  
 Northwestern University Library,  
 Edward S. Curtis's 'The North  
 American Indian': the  
 Photographic Images, 2001.



- 2 The Kwak'waka-speaking tribes in the area of Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada; also called the Kwakiutl.

Euro-American narrative frameworks. *In the Land of the War Canoes* (1914), Edward Curtis's film about Kwakwaka'wakw life before European contact, offers a particularly powerful focal text, standing at the crossroads between the impulses of nineteenth-century photography and the rising medium of cinema.<sup>2</sup> The film represents an important point of intertextual origin for documentary film in the converging discourses of cultural anthropology, popular melodrama and race theory at the beginning of the twentieth century. Like his photographs, Curtis's film, while staging the Native actors and their cultural expressions in a melodramatic cover story, has also provided images that contemporary Native communities have integrated into their attempts to recuperate cultural ties. Along with other ethnographic materials from the same period, the film has contributed to a visual archive available for indigenous repurposing, often at an intimately local level of familial recognition.

In telling contrast to Curtis's authenticating strategies are those of Native American and First Nations representations of oral narratives on screen since 1980 (the year that Laguna Pueblo author Leslie Marmon Silko made her film *Stolen Rain*, based on a Laguna story). A comparison of Edward Curtis's film with those by contemporary Native filmmakers such as Zacharias Kunuk and Victor Masayesva, among others, suggests the way in which 'situations' and stories influence the perceptions of the visible, locating them in narratives of artifice and authenticity, vanishing and survival. What exactly is gained – or regained – when indigenous narratives structure and situate cinematic images? How do re-enactments and retellings of oral narratives on film affect projects of community revitalization and the ethics of cultural and intercultural transmission? How can film history and film criticism centred in western constructions of family romance address films such as *Atanarjuat/The Fast Runner* (Zacharias Kunuk, 2001), in which Inuit

kinship networks, including spiritual ties based on reincarnation, determine both film production and content? Examining how issues of cultural repatriation figure in re-aligning photographic and cinematic meaning reveals the circumstances of the Native actors and interpreters who participated in early films and the ways in which contemporary films reflect on and offer alternative narrative, performance and production situations.

Many contemporary Native filmmakers have reclaimed indigenous images by filming dramatizations or re-enactments of indigenous narratives, including creation stories as well as legends about historical events. This emerging 'cinema of oral performance' includes Victor Masayesva's *Itam Hakim, Hopiit/We, Someone, the Hopi* (1984) and Zacharias Kunuk's *Atanarjuat*, as well as a host of other work in film and video. These films by indigenous directors and producers, sometimes made in collaboration with outsiders, include key elements that are missing in earlier docu-dramas. Most importantly, they introduce a contextual frame or indication of the storytelling performance, while situating 'old' stories in a post-contact, identifiably contemporary setting that both brings the story itself forward and indicates the metanarrative process of producing the story, the mechanics of telling. Further, by privileging multigenerational contexts and images of Native children as the listening audience, the filmmakers challenge the 'vanishing Indian' trope that has structured assimilationist policies, 'blood quantum' racial criteria, the dismantling of treaty commitments and institutional interventions in Native families. Through strategic attention to production situations, oral storytelling performance and the historical investment in 'the power of actuality,' the filmmakers attempt to imaginatively recover the cultural values encoded in the narratives.

Narratives of vanishing natives elide the issue of future generations through images of assimilation or the omission of children, while films such as *Atanarjuat* and *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* place children at the centre of the story performance as listeners and as heirs to sovereignty rights based on cultural heritage. Some documentaries by non-Native filmmakers, including *Coming to Light: Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indians* (Anne Makepeace, 2000), *Box of Treasures* (Chock Olin/U'Mista Cultural Center, 1983) and *Nanook Revisited* (Claus Massot, 1994), have traced the impact and use of silent film images by Edward Curtis and Robert Flaherty in indigenous communities, while others, such as *The Return of Navajo Boy* (Jeff Spitz, 2001) connect repatriated footage with family reunion. Catherine Russell writes that persistent indigenous interest in early ethnographic films suggests the films' multifaceted roles as documents of both living cultural memory and historical colonial containment.<sup>3</sup>

If photography is inextricably linked, through its history and its contemporary use, to an imperialist gaze, the very act of bringing the presence of the oppressed into the realm of the reproducible image also conveys the possibility of recuperation in which a new narrative appropriates the power of signification. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland

3 Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: the Work of Film in the Age of Video* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 113.

4 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1981), pp. 10, 13, 78.

5 Ibid., pp. 89–90, 78.

6 Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), p. 155. Additionally, see Rosalind Morris, *New Worlds from Fragments: Film, Ethnography, and the Representation of Northwest Coast Cultures* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), pp. 175–7.

7 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 90, and Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, pp. 154–5, 158.

8 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p. 96. The sentiment of helplessness is described by Philip Fisher in *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985).

9 Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, p. 156.

Barthes writes that the self is constituted in photography ‘in the process of “posing”’, and the converse, that ‘what founds the nature of Photography is the pose’. For Barthes, the long poses required by early photography are a metaphor for the ‘body in its passage to immobility’ as ‘photography transformed subject into object, and even . . . into a museum object’. With multiple claims on the image by photographer, viewer and subject/object, we can ask with Barthes about the ‘disturbance’ of ownership: ‘to whom does the photograph belong?’ – a parallel question to filmmaker David MacDougall’s ‘whose story is it?’<sup>4</sup> Barthes distinguishes between photography, which freezes the pose, denying it movement and future, and the flow of cinema, which glimpses the figure in passing.<sup>5</sup> Here, I move more fluidly between photography and film, since my focus is on the way ‘poses’ are made part of a constitutive or continuous history through the narrative claiming of cinematic images. Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor engages Barthes’s concept of the pose in the politicized context of Native American images, coining the phrase ‘fugitive poses’ to indicate changeable strategies of dominance and ‘survance’. ‘Fugitive poses’ describes both an ‘ethnographic surveillance’ that freezes its subjects into simulations of absence, and the fleeting ‘native presence’ that asserts survance through the ‘solace and mythic chance of traditions and memories in narratives, *not* cameras’.<sup>6</sup>

Barthes’s description of photography as documentary evidence of a past presence that is ‘without future’ lays the groundwork for Vizenor’s assertion that photographs are ‘possessory’ spectacles ‘that separated natives from their communities and ancestral lands’, and further, that ‘capturable native motion is aesthetic servitude’.<sup>7</sup> Barthes’s emotional realization of ‘*a catastrophe which has already occurred*’ – the *punctum* – echoes a sentiment connected with mourning or weeping as a form of helplessness, a pose also characteristic of the ‘vanishing Indian’ trope that so deeply inflected narratives and images early in the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup> Vizenor claims that photography and other ‘simulations’ are available for other purposes, both within Native communities and in the context of the history of the ‘portraiture of dominance’: ‘The eyes that meet in the aperture are the assurance of narratives and a sense of native presence’.<sup>9</sup> While the circumstances of the initial photographic encounter and the thoughts of those whose ‘eyes meet in the aperture’ are never totally available to viewers, documentary images can clearly bring into being a ‘native presence’ as well as a ‘vanishing Indian’, the two potential narratives each bound up with issues of memory, recognition and anticipation.

Kwakwaka’wakw, Inuit and other groups have used Curtis’s images to reconnect with a precontact past, appropriating and reframing mediated images to assert a distinct cultural identity and collective sovereignty. These narratives counter governmental assimilationist policies, based on ‘blood quantum’ definitions of identity, aimed at eliminating treaty-based land rights and federal services. Chadwick Allen calls attention to

<sup>10</sup> Chadwick Allen, *Blood Narrative: Indigenous Identity in American Indian and Maori Literary and Activist Texts* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> See Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, as well as Mick Gidley, 'Edward S. Curtis's Indian photographs: a national enterprise', in Mick Gidley (ed.), *Representing Others* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1994); Christopher Lyman, *The Vanishing Race and Other Illusions: Photographs of Indians by Edward S. Curtis* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982); Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye: Race, Cinema and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996) and Lucy R. Lippard (ed.), *Partial Recall: Photographs of Native North Americans* (New York, NY: New York Press, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Bill Holm and George Quimby, *Edward S. Curtis in the Land of the War Canoes* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1980), p. 36. Mick Gidley, in *Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian, Incorporated* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), asserts that Curtis's story was influenced most by Longfellow's 1855 *The Song of Hiawatha* (p. 232).

<sup>13</sup> Franz Boas, *Kwakiutl Tales*, 1910 (New York, NY: AMS Press, 1969). Franz Boas and George Hunt, *Kwakiutl Texts*, 1905 (New York, NY: AMS Press, 1975).

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Holm and Quimby, *Edward S. Curtis in the Land of the War Canoes*, pp. 121, 125.

tropes of 'blood memory' in Native American activist and literary texts. Narrating connective ties with tribal ancestors imagines an identity that resists governmental definitions of Indianness by quota of blood, transforming 'that taxonomy of delegitimization through genetic mixing into an authenticating genealogy of stories and storytelling'.<sup>10</sup> Images taken in the past may never be fully rewritten, and acts of repatriation more broadly can denote bitter loss and interruption as well as more utopic notions of restitution and renewal. Through their projects of cinematic retelling, these indigenous filmmakers work in the delicate balance between retrieval and invention to shape a modern identity by deploying a reconstructed past.

Edward Curtis's photographic and cinematic images have already been critiqued for the stories they tell. His images did much to further the 'vanishing Indian' trope and the idea of the authentic or pure Indian, frozen in time and untouched by Euro-American culture. Close scrutiny of Curtis's photographs reveals his strategic and careful arrangement of his subjects to conform to an idea of the precontact 'primitive'. Curtis regularly cropped and retouched photographic images to obscure the posed nature of the shots. He supplied wigs and costumes, and removed wristwatches, umbrellas, suspenders and signs of written language in order to eliminate evidence of acculturation, hybridity and modernity.<sup>11</sup> His works were at best mediated images of Native people; at worst, they undermined Native survival by presenting a vanished Indian. Yet what is the story of Curtis's *story*, and how does it intersect on screen with the stories of the people and objects he filmed?

In writing *In the Land of the War Canoes*, Curtis made up a story to justify the display of costumes, artefacts and dances and to show as many ceremonial activities as possible – a narrative 'glue' or 'pastiche'.<sup>12</sup> Given his extremely careful control of images so as to eliminate evidence of European influence, why did Curtis not use Kwakwaka'wakw stories as the basis for his scenario for the film? They were certainly available in Franz Boas's publications and from the Kwakwaka'wakw communities where Curtis filmed. Boas had recently published *Kwakiutl Texts* with George Hunt in 1905 and *Kwakiutl Tales* in 1910, and Curtis was in regular correspondence with Boas.<sup>13</sup> Further, Curtis and Boas both worked extensively with George Hunt, a native speaker of the Kwak'waka language. Curtis himself, with Hunt's help, had collected Kwakwaka'wakw narratives from the communities where he filmed *War Canoes*.

Curtis could easily have used a local narrative – one told to him or gleaned from Boas' collections – as the basis for his film. In an interview with Curtis in 1915, the *Strand* magazine writes that he 'regarded the [film] from a purely educational standpoint, but in order to add to the interest he felt compelled to mix it with a little romance . . . The story, of course, is a minor detail, the real object of the film being to show the customs, amusements, fights, domestic life, and sports of the North American Indians.'<sup>14</sup> By treating the narrative scenario as 'a minor

detail' and by ignoring the rich potential of the Kwakwaka'wakw verbal art that was all around him, Curtis missed the opportunity to give the silent images an indigenous 'voice'. His film also isolates aspects of Kwakwaka'wakw life from their resonance in everyday life by highlighting the decontextualized objects and ceremonies only, without a corresponding depiction of either ordinary activities or the body of lore that surrounded them.

Curtis was attuned, though, to the values and expectations of his intended audience. Still photography had long relied on narrative frameworks to guide viewers' interpretations of the images on display. Martha Sandweiss, tracing the relationship between narrative modes and early photography, observes that the 'literal accuracy' of nineteenth-century daguerrotypes 'could not satisfy a public that . . . valued the symbolic and theatrical'.<sup>15</sup> To become a marketable image the photograph had to become iconic, 'an important scene in a longer story'. Attached narratives gave early photographs a fixed meaning and interpretation through sequential presentation, in narrative lectures accompanying slide shows and via short titles and texts appended to the photographs themselves. Even in silent film, the heir to the theatrical and narrative impulses in photography, intertitles help the viewer interpret the visual sequences.<sup>16</sup> Curtis's own cinematography follows the stylized techniques of his photographs, and attests to the influence of Alfred Steiglitz and the other pictorialists who used silhouettes and blurred, misty effects to create expressive photographs that adopted the dramatic qualities of etchings and lithographs.<sup>17</sup> Curtis's complex narrative, however, is carried largely by the intertitle cards, without which the film's plot would be almost impossible to follow.

What is this narrative that frames Curtis's images for the viewers and guides their interpretation? In a gesture typical of Euro-American narratives about indigenous peoples during this period, the film depicts a heroic warrior figure and a 'Sorcerer' who practices ineffective magic. This negative view of the shaman or healer figure reflects turn-of-the-century race theory, based on biological determinism, which combined ideas about progressive developmental stages of humanity with an assertion of Anglo-Saxon racial supremacy.<sup>18</sup> The Sorcerer figure was perceived in this context as a relic of pre-Christian, pre-agrarian and prescientific thought. As such, he represented spiritual elements of indigenous cultures that westerners most rejected yet simultaneously sought to recreate through display. As Fatimah Tobing Rony has noted, the 'politics of authenticity' in salvage ethnography visualized a 'vanishing native' who was 'simultaneously pathological and genuine'.<sup>19</sup> Curtis's recording of the ritual life of the Kwakwaka'wakw both attests to its value and acts to devalue that very ritual life, not only in the filming but in the narrative that frames the objects and images Curtis worked so hard to collect, document, preserve and display.

It is important to note also that Kwakwaka'wakw shamanism was itself highly theatrical, involving public displays of magical 'tricks' and,

15 Martha Sandweiss, 'Undecisive moments: the narrative tradition in Western photography', in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America* (Fort Worth/New York, NY: Amon Carter Museum and Harry N. Abrams, 1991), pp. 106, 102.

16 For further discussion of the impact of ethnography on technologies of photography and cinema, see Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-century Visual Culture* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2002).

17 The phrase 'Ink of Light' in my title comes from Jean Cocteau's interest in 'verite' cinematic adaptations of fairy tales and his precise use of what he calls the ink of light, 'encre de lumière' — as against the blurry, soft-focus style that gives pictorial photography a nostalgic atmosphere. Cocteau is quoted in Lynn Hoggard, 'Writing with the "Ink of Light": Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*', in Wendell Aycock and Michael Schoenke (eds), *Film and Literature: A Comparative Approach to Adaptation* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 1989), pp. 123–34.

18 For a discussion of the history of race theory, see Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: the Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

19 Rony, *The Third Eye*, p. 92.

according to Michael Taussig, a deep interdependence between skepticism and faith, between 'skilled revelation and skilled concealment'. Aspiring healers reinforced the shamanic system by combining a suspicion of elder shamans' fraudulence with a paradoxical desire to acquire their technique. The 'nervous system' of shamanism involves 'learning shamanism' and 'doubting it at the same time'. Taussig's case study, four versions of George Hunt's autobiography (finally published in 1930 as *I Desired to Learn the Ways of the Shaman*), demonstrates the deeply intercultural nature of any conclusion regarding Kwakwaka'wakw shamanism and its representations in ethnographic texts.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Michael Taussig, 'Viscerality, faith, and skepticism: another theory of magic', in Nicholas B. Dirks (ed.), *In Near Ruins: Cultural Theory at the End of the Century* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, 1998), pp. 241, 229, 235, 232 and 222.

Catherine Russell argues that Curtis's original film, *In the Land of the Headhunters*, is essentially a completely different film than the restored version, retitled *In the Land of the War Canoes*, which has reduced footage and fewer intertitles. The commingling of Hollywood melodrama and salvage ethnography in the restored film (the only version available for analysis), Russell asserts, represents an early instance of experimental filmmaking as 'antirealist discourse' that 'frees ethnography from the burden of authority and from the weight of the historiography of loss'.<sup>21</sup> Yet Curtis's photoplay also reconstitutes and bolsters popular western cultural narratives, already widely current in silent 'Indian dramas', in which 'vanishing' indigenous spiritual practices exist in opposition to discourses of western rationality and Christian reform. This impulse to unmask or debunk is one of the animating features of Edward Curtis's 1914 film.

<sup>21</sup> Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, p. 113.

The narrative mode that Curtis chose to reach his audience was melodrama. The stock characters of melodrama are apparent: Motana is the victim-hero, the Sorcerer the villain, and Naida the maiden in distress. Melodrama, which offers what has been called 'moral legibility in an era of moral uncertainty', narrates sympathy with the suffering of the noble and virtuous in Motana and rejection of villainy coded as 'savagery' in the Sorcerer.<sup>22</sup> Yet the very elements that Curtis's audiences found most fascinating in the film – the spectacle of ceremonial dances, religious objects, 'vision quests' – are those they most associated with a 'backward', 'superstitious' and, above all, *false* belief system. The work of the film is to bring these two sites of visual pleasure into a staged – melodramatic – conflict. Curtis's assertion of the film's authenticity and realism (its 'documentary mode') present in the *details* of artefact, figure and image, is contradicted by the narrative's 'melodramatic mode', which places the characters in a distinctly Euro-American story about heroism, villainy and moral excess.

<sup>22</sup> See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 15.

In the film, the warrior Motana and the 'Sorcerer' compete for the hand of Naida. The Sorcerer's magic fails, but war breaks out between the families of the two men, culminating in a canoe chase in which Motana's men are triumphant. Early on, Curtis depicts a secret tryst between Motana and Naida. The Sorcerer's evil nature becomes visible as he crawls on all fours through the underbrush. Significantly, although he is



23 Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other: Writing, Postcoloniality, and Feminism* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 69.

cast as the viewer's opposite, he also allows for a doubling of the viewer's investigative gaze. His actions replicate what Trinh T. Minh-ha calls the 'legal voyeurism' of anthropology, in which observations 'give the reader the feeling of being the accomplice of a voyeur hidden behind some wall or bush, taking delight in seeing and appropriating two lovers' utmost intimate acts.'<sup>23</sup> As the lovers part, Motana is in silhouette as Naida paddles her canoe away from him along a path of sunlight reflected by the waters. Reviewers admired Curtis's experimental technique of pointing the camera into the sun to achieve the spectacular lighting effects of the sunset on water, and the beauty of this image invests the couple with an aura of natural legitimacy and moral good. Their separation echoes Curtis's photographs of Indians departing on horseback toward an unknown future at the vanishing point of the horizon. Curtis's narrative sustains the couple in the end, but this image depicts a nostalgic sense of loss that would have been immediately resonant for an audience familiar with narratives and images of vanishing Indians and doomed Indian romance.

The Sorcerer's voyeuristic intrusion on the lovers signals his devious character, and the choice of actor, an older man, suggests to the western audience the character's unsuitability for the young Naida. The Sorcerer's use of stealth, intermediaries and what audiences would think of as 'black magic' all demonstrate his negative moral status. In deliberate contrast to the Sorcerer, Motana, the young warrior and son of village leader Kenada, is introduced through a series of scenes in which he seeks spiritual power alone on a peak. Thus Motana's attempt to gain spiritual and social power – staged on a mountaintop – is depicted as morally and geographically on the 'up-and-up'. Motana's vigils are interrupted twice by romantic entanglements. First, Naida appears to him in a dream and he leaves his quest to woo her; later, the Sorcerer's daughter tries and fails to seduce him. In an attempt to make Motana sick, the Sorcerer uses a neck ring and a lock of hair stolen by the spurned lover. Describing the witchery, the intertitle reads: 'The Plotters, anticipating Motana's death, "mourn" him as his hair, stuffed into the bodies of toads, smokes over their fire.' The Sorcerer and his helpers sit beneath a tree, surrounded by skulls. The Sorcerer's status rests in human machinations, his selfish desire to claim Naida and destroy Motana, not in spiritual power. He is a flimsy obstacle to Motana and Naida's romance, and is dispatched early in the film; it is his brother Yaklus, another warrior, who is the more formidable foe. The melodramatic action offers audiences images of Kwakwaka'wakw spiritual beliefs that are both exotic in surface detail and deeply familiar in narrative structure. Curtis's narrative imagines a fake Sorcerer and an authentic, transcendent Warrior; his story attempts to contain, aestheticize and market both figures through a cinematic 'museumification'.

In Curtis's film, Kwakwaka'wakw identity and the land itself are associated with headhunting in the original title 'In the Land of the Head-Hunters', and scene after scene contains men waving the heads of their



24 See Rony, *The Third Eye*, p. 97.

enemies. In fact, while heads were sometimes taken in the past as war trophies, 'headhunting' was never an important aspect of Kwakwaka'wakw ceremonial life. Curtis's emphasis on vision-quests and on headhunting distracts viewers from such central aspects of Kwakwaka'wakw life as the potlatch, which was in 1914 already banned by the Canadian government.<sup>24</sup> Potlatches are complex, lavish, communal ceremonial events involving gift-giving. Prior to 1885, potlatches were a central feature of Pacific northwest tribal cultural life. Over several days of feasting, singing and storytelling, the potlatch host distributed and sometimes destroyed possessions in a display of abundance that both accrued social status to the giver and redistributed wealth throughout the community. Potlatches could also establish or transfer land claims, hunting and fishing rights, and ownership of specific images, stories and songs. Perceived by outsiders as wasteful and heathen, the potlatch was banned by the Canadian government from 1885 until 1951.

Perhaps the most dramatic and far-reaching instance of the link between anthropological display and cultural suppression is the Canadian government's trial of Dan Cranmer for hosting a potlatch in 1921. The potlatch was raided by the Canadian Royal Mounted Police led by the Indian agent William Halliday, and the participants were given the choice of serving jail time or giving up the gifts and regalia to museums in Ottawa, Hull and New York City. The system of traditional potlatch ceremonies, central to Kwakwaka'wakw life, was greatly diminished as a result of these events. The case serves as an example of the way the enshrinement of objects in museums worked in tandem with governmental regulation of Indian identity and prevented Kwakwaka'wakw communities from asserting the living indigeneity 'imagined' and 'spoken' by the potlatch.<sup>25</sup>

While the filming of people, objects and dances in *War Canoes* did freeze their images in time, enacting the strategies of containment and 'museumification' ongoing in salvage ethnography, the film's production also *generated* objects. The filmmaking provided the opportunity and economic incentive – though for a limited time – for Kwakwaka'wakw to revisit and relearn skills in making ceremonial objects and clothes, thus indicating how film production might serve as a site of cultural revival and renewal rather than an instance of vanishing. Curtis's early attempt to 'do it right' – to depict correctly precontact cultural details – was also successful in many respects. For example, the witchcraft practised by the Sorcerer was immediately recognizable as such by Kwakwaka'wakw viewers in the late 1960s, although it was coded as ineffectual in the film's narrative. For all the problems of representation characteristic of Curtis's images, the Kwakwaka'wakw actors in *War Canoes* apparently enjoyed the filming immensely, and were able for a brief space of time to make and use items that were normally prohibited.<sup>26</sup>

25 See James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

26 See *Coming to Light*.

Although significant differences exist between Canadian and United States Policies towards indigenous peoples, my discussion frequently crosses this national border in order to follow Curtis's work, cross-cultural indigenous film making strategies, and structurally similar patterns of colonization, oppression and resistance. Curtis's search for authenticity articulates an ambivalence towards modernity and a longing for escape from or transcendence of tensions between agrarian and industrial conditions and Christian and scientific models of thought. The rhetoric of democracy so at odds with the moral problem of conquest, racial hierarchy and land theft in US history created a 'moral illegibility' that drove a desire to mystify the past through melodramatic frontier narratives and the 'imperialist nostalgia' so prevalent in representations of Native people and the American frontier.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the collaboration and tension between realism and moral 'excess' in melodrama correlate with the collaboration and tension between the 'realism' of the documentary image, with its scientific anthropological authenticity, and the theatricality, or artifice, of the 'love triangle' story Curtis invented. His film was meant to display the sacred objects, songs and dances of the Kwakwaka'wakw, but his narrative undermines that very belief system by envisioning the Sorcerer as a fraud whose magic fails to affect his intended victim.

Curtis's film is only one example of several films made during the second decade of the twentieth century that express the tension between the desire for an increased realism or authenticity in the depiction of Native peoples and the melodramatic mode through which popular audiences accessed such information and images. Audiences of the time were steeped in melodrama and brought expectations in relation to this narrative mode with them into the theatres, and were deeply invested in 'going native' as an expression of ambivalence toward modernity'.<sup>28</sup> In the same time period, for example, the 'Indian drama' subgenre of the silent Western was enjoying its heyday and French film companies such as Pathé Frères that dominated the genre came under increasing industry criticism for their inauthentic images of the American West. James Young Deer (Winnebago), the first Native American film director, had been in the business for several years and another Native director, Edwin Carewe (Chicasaw), was hopping freight cars westward with Jack London, headed for Hollywood. Mary Austin, who contributed so significantly to the literary, modernist interest in and incorporation of the idea of the 'primitive', was writing 'Indian dramas' for the stage. This rich interchange between writers and directors led to a cross-pollination between documentary and melodramatic impulses. Westerns picked up an aura of historical and ethnographic authenticity, and the nascent documentary genre was influenced by a popular culture deeply invested in both constructions of Indianness and the drive for 'moral legibility' inherent in the didacticism of melodrama.<sup>29</sup>

Curtis's technologically enhanced 'popular ethnography' involved documenting cultural practices, collecting artefacts from Native

27 For his discussion of 'imperialist nostalgia', see Renato Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth: the Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1989).

28 See Shari Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

29 See Joanna Hearne, "'The Cross-Heart People': race and inheritance in the silent Western", *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 30, no. 4 (2003), pp. 181–96.

informants and keeping in good standing with ethnographers, but was also concerned to produce material for an elite – wealthy and educated – non-Native public. He benefitted, for example, from his connections with influential men from a variety of social arenas, including industrial capitalist J. Pierpont Morgan, President Theodore Roosevelt (for whom he took family portraits), environmentalist John Muir, filmmaker Cecil B. DeMille and ethnographer Franz Boas. He decontextualized the masks, dances and other emblems of Kwakwaka'wakw culture and then embedded them in a story of vanishing already implicit in the minds of the film's contemporary audience. In fact, one might say that the story of this film is also a history of the transfer and redefinition of objects.

Costuming goes to the very heart of Curtis's contradictory representation of the Kwakwaka'wakw and their crafts. The objects – masks, costumes, totem poles, traditional houses and other ceremonial and everyday materials – have been the subject of scrutiny and critical debate. Here the scholarly sources are conflicting. Fatimah Tobing Rony asserts that objects for the film were taken from museums for the filming and returned to the tribe: 'they literally take the large, beautiful, striking masks . . . off the museum wall and put them in their natural settings'.<sup>30</sup> According to Bill Holm and George Quimby, however, many of the items were purchased from Kwakwaka'wakw community members by Hunt for Curtis's collection and for use in the film, and many of these objects later turned up in museum collections in British Columbia, Vancouver, Seattle and Milwaukee.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, in one scholarly story about Curtis, the film's objects circulate from museum back into the community, and in another they move from the community into private collections and museums. Curtis was praised in his own time for displaying ethnographic materials using actual Native figures, rather than the clothed wax models and 'life groups' in museums. Vachel Lindsey called Curtis's cinematic figures 'bronze in action', a phrase that has both racial and sculptural overtones.<sup>32</sup> Both possibilities support scientific models of racial classification – what Fatimah Rony would call 'taxidermic display' – that also enabled the government's discourse of 'blood quantum' as a physical index of eligibility for authentic Indian identity.<sup>33</sup> Further, the objects collected and displayed in museums were not meant to be worn, used or given away and this form of appropriation for 'non-use' parallels Franz Boas's ethnographic texts. David Murray writes of Boas's *Kwakiutl Texts* that: 'Whites did not know the [Kwak'wala] language, and Native speakers could not read it . . . So we have a text in which half the page is there *not* to be read. One of the functions is to act as the "other" of the English, and in addition, it acts as repository of evidence, a . . . silent corroboration'.<sup>34</sup> The text's silence is further politicized when we remember that Kwakwaka'wakw youth were losing their language at boarding schools. Almost a hundred years later another audience, though a very small one, has emerged for Boas's bilingual texts – Kwakwaka'wakw who are literate in Kwak'wala and English and can access the entire text both to revive older traditions

30 Rony, *The Third Eye*, p. 95.

31 Holm and Quimby, *Edward S. Curtis in the Land of the War Canoes*.

32 Vachel Lindsey, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), p. 114.

33 Fatimah Tobing Rony, 'Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*: the politics of taxidermy and romantic ethnography', in Daniel Bernardi (ed.), *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of U.S. Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1996), p. 301.

34 David Murray, *Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 107.

and stories and to research the history of ethnographic encounters with their relatives.

Curtis's work influenced the evolution of the documentary genre towards a narrative or theatrical presentation of ethnographic material. Although the film itself quickly fell into obscurity, Curtis had a strong influence on Robert Flaherty, who in the process of making *Nanook of the North* (1922) visited Curtis's New York studio for a special screening of *In the Land of the Headhunters*, and afterwards maintained a correspondence with Curtis.<sup>35</sup> Later documentaries and docu-dramas also present ethnographic material via a melodramatic plot, including films such as Carver and Burden's *The Silent Enemy* (1930), in which the medicine man plots to marry the Chief's daughter, who must be rescued by a warrior figure. The melodramatic characteristics of television nature specials derived, in part, from exploration films such as *90 Degrees South* (Ponting, 1933), which sentimentalize animals while narrating their subjugation to Darwinian 'laws of nature' so that predators and prey play out the drama of the threatened family. Other trends in ethnographic filmmaking moved away from the 'connected story' technique aimed at popular as well as scholarly audiences, and focused instead on scientific discourses in representing cultural patterns. Franz Boas corresponded extensively with the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America or 'Hays Office', but in the end did not produce the ethnographic films planned; however, Boas clearly manifested a belief that 'surfaces and visual fragments' could carry 'the imprint of cultural patterning'.<sup>36</sup> In the 1930s Boas wanted to preserve only the parts of Curtis's film that depicted ceremonies and dances (such as the wedding party in the giant war canoes), separating and discarding Curtis's 'connected story', abstracting artefact from narrative and transforming narratives into artefacts. This impulse to preserve the fragments or icons perceived to be scientifically valuable was in keeping with his own fieldwork and ethnographic technique, which involved publication of 'representative' texts without contextual information, thus 'turning a temporal process, a flux, into a form that can be fixed and then returned to at leisure and studied'.<sup>37</sup>

James Clifford asserts that classical ethnography employs 'fables of rapport' to disguise relationships of unequal power between informant and ethnographer. The relationship between Franz Boas and George Hunt is instructive; throughout their 40 years of work together, correspondence indicates that 'Boas is clearly both directing the overall shape of Hunt's activities and dependent on his knowledge and his initiatives'. In a letter to his wife, Boas states 'I tell Hunt what I want and he brings the people to me. . . . He would always find my victims, whom I then pumped dry'.<sup>38</sup> Boas's and Curtis's field techniques were somewhat similar in that they were more interested in collecting large quantities of material than in the now-common practice of reflecting on fieldwork experiences, relationships with informants and methodologies. While Boas resituated ethnographic materials in a discourse of scientific

35 See Holmes and Quimby, Edward S. Curtis in the Land of the War Canoes.

36 Ira Jacknis, 'The picturesque and the scientific: Franz Boas' plan for anthropological filmmaking', *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 1 (1988), p. 63.

37 Murray, *Forked Tongues*, p. 101.

38 Ibid., p. 102.

objectivity, Curtis recorded (and recoded) them as educational popular entertainment using melodrama.

*Nanook of the North* (Flaherty 1922) is much more frequently cited as the first ethnographic documentary, and offers a contrast to Curtis's earlier film while demonstrating the filmmakers' shared ideologies in imagining indigenous peoples as 'primitive man'. In a famous scene, Nanook (the actor Allakariallak), encounters the white trader's gramophone, explained to him (and to the viewer) in the intertitle as 'the way the white man "cans" his voice'. Nanook's amazement and childish behaviour towards this recording technology implies an 'authenticity' that is coded as antimodern and non-technological. Further, as Rony has suggested, it 'engrains the notion that the people are not really acting' when in fact the Inuit community 'served as Flaherty's film crew'.<sup>39</sup> The film seems oblivious to its own metanarrative of the 'canned white voice', but recent filmmakers have reflected more consciously on the relationship between recording voices on film and imagining Native identities.<sup>40</sup>

Curtis's film itself was repatriated when in 1967 Bill Holm and George Quimby showed the footage to Kwakwaka'wakw audiences, many of whom had been participants in the filmmaking. Some of these participants contributed to a new soundtrack for the film in 1972, adding another layer of verbal reinterpretation to the images that had previously been defined only by intertitles. Thus the film functions as a mediated product whose return to the Native community has significance in itself. In 2000, Anne Makepeace's documentary *Coming to Light* highlighted another repatriation as the ancestors of the Native people Curtis photographed have 're-recognized' the photographs as family portraits by identifying those pictured by name.<sup>41</sup> Photos encountered on calendars and postcards are decoded and recoded by comments such as 'That's my mother, making piki',<sup>42</sup> or 'I always see her picture . . . Every time I look at the books, she's there. But they never use her name, just "Hesquiaht woman". But I know her name. It's Virginia Tom.'<sup>43</sup>

Such specific identifications resituate the portraits as private and tribal rather than anonymous and commercial. Other Native viewers have used the photos to revive cultural traditions rather than to document their loss, as happened when Piegan men revived the Sundance on their reserve after forty years, partly inspired by Curtis's photographs of the ceremony. Makepeace's documentary offers a Native counter-voice that is far less damning of Curtis than are most scholarly assessments of his work. For example, George Horse Capture (A'aninin Gros Ventre) values the photographs as concrete triggers for memories and asserts that 'when people start criticizing stereotypes, I look at my great-grandfather—he's not a stereotype. He can't stage that . . . the eyes, the determination.' Theoria Howatu (Hopi) is not bothered by criticisms of Curtis's artifice: 'We have these pictures to show us how they *really* were back then'.<sup>44</sup> Howatu's and Horse Capture's comments suggest an engagement with Curtis's images as a direct conduit to the past, a

39 Rony, *The Third Eye*, p. 305.

Frances Hubbard Flaherty describes the Inuit crew fixing Flaherty's camera in the field in her book *The Odyssey of a Filmmaker: Robert Flaherty's Story* (Urbana, IL: Beta Phi Mu Chapbook, 1960), p. 14.

40 There is an extensive literature on *Nanook of the North*. See Huhndorf, *Going Native*; Rony, *The Third Eye*; Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*; and Ann Fienup-Riordan, *Freeze Frame: Alaska Eskimos in the Movies* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1995).

41 See Chadwick Allen's analysis of indigenous 're-recognition' of colonial discourses as an alternative strategy to deconstruction, in *Blood Narrative*, p. 18.

42 Quoted in *Coming to Light*.

43 Quoted in Clifford, *Routes*, p. 129.

44 Quoted in *Coming to Light*.

discourse of tradition close to (but not the same as) Curtis's own vision of authenticity and one that rewrites scholarly criticism of Curtis's artificiality for the purposes of constituting and consolidating Native identity and family history.

Filmmaker David MacDougall characterizes recent shifts in ethnographic filmmaking toward 'multiple voices' as 'intertextual cinema', anticipating more productions that 're-deploy existing texts and incorporate parallel interpretations'.<sup>45</sup> For example, surveying Australian ethnographic films by non-Natives, MacDougall suggests that the films become 'compound works' when interpreted according to Aboriginal cultural structures. Films that depict rituals and regalia become 'emblems' subject to the same rules as other ritual objects, and landscape views denote instances of 'showing and seeing' – an education in geography for Aboriginal youth – that constitute a 'charter' or assertion of land rights.<sup>46</sup> Taking up MacDougall's focus on films as objects with 'multiple identities', Faye Ginsburg proposes the term 'parallax effect' to describe the way indigenous media can productively challenge ethnographic filmmaking based on a new cultural positioning of the filmmaker.<sup>47</sup> Ginsburg's attention to film production, circulation and viewership as sites of social and political action suggests that such a 'change in position' can work towards 'mediation of ruptures of cultural knowledge, historical memory, and social relations between generations'.<sup>48</sup>

The script for *Atanarjuat*, based on a historical legend told among Inuit people in the northern Arctic community of Igloolik, was based on the versions of eight Inuit elders recorded by writer and filmmaker Paul Apak. Both Curtis's and Kunuk's films tell stories infused with melodrama featuring love triangles that focus on witchcraft, community division and young male heroes. Yet while Curtis's film undermines the validity of a Native belief system by presuming its demise, Kunuk's film demonstrates its power through the depiction of shamanic communication and reincarnation. Kunuk, who grew up in a traditional sod house until he was sent to boarding school at age nine, writes that 'I first heard the story of Atanarjuat from my mother . . . [she] would put us to sleep at night with these stories about our ancestors, how they lived, and what would happen to us if we were like this one or that one when we grew up'.<sup>49</sup> Kunuk's film, like *War Canoes*, naturalizes social systems in part through its focus on the precontact past. However, in the context of tight governmental regulation of Native identities based on racialized discourses of blood quantum, a system which ensures a decreasing Native population through intermarriage, Kunuk's film re-imagines and 'appropriates the experience of his own ancestors' to forge a collective identity based on narrative as well as on image.<sup>50</sup>

In a striking scene at the centre of the film, Atanarjuat, returning from a hunting trip in his kayak, follows a path of sunlight on the water as he sings a love song that employs images of bedrock, rivers and mountains. He arrives at the shore and is greeted by his pregnant wife

45 David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), pp. 148–9.

46 Ibid., p. 159.

47 Faye Ginsburg, 'The Parallax Effect: the impact of indigenous media on ethnographic film', in Jane M. Gaines and Michael Renov (eds), *Collecting Visible Evidence* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), pp. 156–75.

48 Ibid., pp. 168–9.

49 Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, 'Making *Atanarjuat*', *Brick*, vol. 70 (2002), p. 17.

50 For a discussion of blood quantum and Indian identity, see Pauline Turner Strong and Barrik Van Winkle, 'Indian Blood': reflections on the reckoning and refiguring of Native North American identity', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 11, no. 4 (1996), p. 562.



Atuat; as he puts his ear to her belly the sun's reflection on the water rests on the point of contact between their bodies and seems to bless the couple's future child Kumaglaq, who will be the focus of the final scene. Atuat and Atanarjuat's unborn son becomes heir to the land in an image that brings the couple together in both emotional and narrative terms for the viewer. Despite the similarities between Kunuk's image and the canoe scene in *War Canoes*, there are subtle differences in the iconography: the family comes together rather than separates and the images of fertility and abundance (Atuat's pregnant belly, the large seal on Atanarjuat's canoe that will feed the family) envision an intact Inuit home in a material, emotional and narrative sense (the 'bedrock' in Atanarjuat's song is echoed visually by the bedrock where his family is camped).<sup>51</sup>

Certainly the melodramatic qualities of *Atanarjuat's* characters – the innocent Atuat, virtuous Atanarjuat and villainous Oki – can be seen, like the characters in *War Canoes*, as a response to a post-contact world that has become 'hard to read'.<sup>52</sup> Shari Huhndorf sees the community disruption in the story as a 'colonial allegory', while Faye Ginsburg calls the story a 'screen memory', inverting Freud's paradigm to describe indigenous uses of media 'not to mask but to recuperate their own collective stories and histories'.<sup>53</sup> Kunuk himself summarizes the change in terms of narrative: 'People in Igloodik learned through storytelling who we were and where we came from for four thousand years without a written language . . . . Four thousand years of oral history silenced by fifty years of priests, schools, and cable tv?'.<sup>54</sup> *Atanarjuat* is clearly available for multiple readings – as is Curtis's film – that include a romanticized vision of primitive simplicity. Yet the activist context of the film's production suggests that this is a strategic instance of cinematic 'communion with ancestors' through an 'assertion of an unmediated relationship to indigenous land' and a testimony to the power of the 'continuation of oral traditions' through which it is possible to define Inuit identity to those inside and outside of the film's primary audience of Igloodik residents.<sup>55</sup>

The film's opening lines are uttered by the shaman, called 'The Evil One', who says, 'I can only sing this song to someone who understands'. His words initiate the community division and at the same time assert a performative context for the telling of the Atanarjuat story on screen in a way that privileges an Inuit audience. Later, a voiceover of a storyteller reflects that 'We never knew what he was or why it happened' – the voice suggests a storytelling frame and the film's ending visualizes the context for storytelling and group singing. The closing scene's iconography of Atanarjuat's reunited family, with a close up of his son Kumaglaq, the next generation and reincarnation of the camp's former leader, rewrites governmental narratives of vanishing Native populations. Kunuk then cuts to the production shots and credits (including the dedication to the film's screenwriter, the late Paul Apak), which pointedly depict another form of storytelling and which

51 Sophie McCall interprets this moment in *Atanarjuat* as a direct quotation of Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*. See her essay 'I can only sing this song to someone who understands it': community filmmaking and the politics of partial translation in 'Atanarjuat/ The Fast Runner', *Essays on Canadian Writing*, vol. 83 (2004), pp. 19–46.

52 Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 19.

53 Shari Huhndorf, 'Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner: culture, history, and politics in Inuit media', *American Anthropologist*, vol. 105, no. 4 (2003), pp. 822–6. Faye Ginsburg, 'Screen memories: resignifying the traditional in indigenous media', in Faye Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod and Brian Larkin (eds), *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), p. 40.

54 Kunuk and Cohn, 'Making Atanarjuat', p. 18.

55 Allen, *Blood Narrative*, p. 178.



simultaneously remember and modernize the Inuit on screen. The actors wear sunglasses, leather jackets and headphones, clothing that marks their full participation in the contemporary world of Native and non-Native viewers. The production footage foregrounds the technological apparatus of cinematic storytelling, a revelation of modernity that Curtis worked hard to conceal in his film and photographs and which Flaherty narrated as existing in opposition to his imagined primitive.

Kunuk and Cohn present their film as 'going completely around film history' and Kunuk himself is presented as largely self-taught (he sold carvings to buy his first video camera in 1981).<sup>56</sup> However, Kunuk also describes living in Igloodik during his teens, carving soapstone to make money to see movies – John Wayne Westerns and Spencer Tracy romantic comedies. 'What I learned in my education', he writes, was 'to think like one of the soldiers' in a cavalry Western. 'When I began to see myself as an Aboriginal person and a filmmaker I learned that there are different ways to tell the same story'.<sup>57</sup> Kunuk's activist filmmaking company works both with and against the film industry and apparatus that influenced him during his education in Igloodik.

Perhaps the most important site of resistance is in the Isuma production style.<sup>58</sup> Cinematographer Norman Cohn describes the location camp and filmed set of *Atanarjuat* as looking and feeling virtually the same, so that the process of shooting itself was like 'playing in a hunting camp' that resembled the living conditions of the film's characters. He notes that the Igloodik Isuma Productions filmmaking style is 'non-military', unlike the more hierarchical Hollywood systems, which he compares with the US military as it 'swept through the American west'. The production of the film itself, then, worked to sustain and revive the Inuit skills and social values that the story of *Atanarjuat* was meant to reinforce, or as Norman Cohn put it, 'We implant these values – our collective process – in our filmmaking process; community support and participation are qualities of production we make visible on the screen'.<sup>59</sup>

Much of the film's plot hinges on Inuit belief in reincarnation and the alternative kinship networks set in motion by naming practices. Among many Inuit groups, babies are named after other members of the community and the namesake is perceived to have the attributes of the name-giver. These 'name-soul' relationships – called *saunik* – have been described by ethnographers as 'surrounded by a magical aura' while overlaying everyday address between generations with an alternative intergenerational connection. Jean Briggs writes that 'in a sense, [the named person] becomes the previous owner or owners of the name', and sometimes takes on the name-giver's family relationships.<sup>60</sup> In *Atanarjuat*, naming relationships account for the intimacy between the matriarch Panikpak (Madeline Ivalu) and the young bride Atuat (Sylvia Ivalu) – who is named after Panikpak's mother – and between Panikpak and Atuat and *Atanarjuat*'s son, Kumaglaq, the youngest child in the camp, who is named after Panikpak's husband (the group's leader, killed in the

56 Zacharias Kunuk and Norman Cohn, interview with Eric Peery, in *Celluloid Fever* (Access Tucson Cable Television, 2002). See also Michael Robert Evans, *Frozen Light and Fluid Time: The Folklore, Politics, and Performance of Inuit Video* (Ph.D thesis, Indiana University, 1999)

57 Kunuk and Cohn, 'Making *Atanarjuat*', p. 18.

58 Isuma Productions (isuma means 'think') creates 'traditional artifacts, digital multimedia, and desperately needed jobs in the same activity'. Ibid., pp. 17–18.

59 Kunuk and Cohn, 'Making *Atanarjuat*', p. 23.

60 See Jean Briggs's classic ethnography, *Never in Anger: Portrait of an Eskimo Family* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), pp. 37–8, and D.L. Guemple, 'Saunik: name sharing as a factor governing Eskimo kinship terms', *Ethnology*, vol. 4 (1965), pp. 328, 330.

61 Press Kit, *Atanarjuat/The Fast Runner*, p. 6.

first scenes of the film by a strange shaman). Ancestors remain present with living generations through their namesakes in the film, and the closing scene derives its resonance from this when Panikpak looks at the child Kumaglaq and hears the voice of her late husband commanding ‘wife, sing my song!’ The medium shot that frames Atanarjuat, Atuut and Kumaglaq together suggests a reunited and re-formed family, sustained in part by the performative context of storytelling and singing. The last frame of the film is a long closeup of Kumaglaq’s face as he listens to ‘his’ song. In this way he becomes an emblem of continuity, bringing together the past and future of the tribe through his literal and spiritual embodiment of a previous generation. Family relations are carried over into the casting as well, since the child Kumaglaq is played by actor Sylvia Ivalu’s actual daughter Bernice Ivalu, lending continuity to the many images of familial intimacy between Atuut and her ‘son’ Kumaglaq in the film (see figure 2). ‘I know we were just acting’, Ivalu notes in an interview, ‘but you could actually feel it’.<sup>61</sup>

Name-sharing may have played a role in the film’s production and casting as well. According to cinematographer Norman Cohn:

when [Paul] Apak was writing the script we think he was sort of casting it in his mind, meaning that he was actually designing characters around real people. So unbeknownst to them he was casting them into the script, and then we would actually go after them, and they would be right because the character was . . . written around their personalities. I think [of] the whole concept of Inuit naming, where the person is named after ancestors who have passed away . . . people have several names, and the concept is that you are now carrying that spirit – it’s almost a form of multiple reincarnation. So Inuit people have a sense that actually the body they’re in, is made up of more than one personality, or competing personalities, of people from the past . . . This Method acting concept of find the person in you and *be* that person, seemed to be a natural process for Inuit to be able to do if the script and characters were believable enough that they were

**Figure 2**  
Atuat (Sylvia Ivalu) and her baby Kumaglaq (Bernice Ivalu). From *Atanarjuat, The Fast Runner* (Dir. Zacharias Kunuk, 2001). Photo credit: M. H. Cousineau  
© Igloolik Isuma Productions.



62 Kunuk and Cohn, interview with Eric Peery, *Celluloid Fever*.

63 Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses*, p. 185.

64 Russell, *Experimental Ethnography*, pp. 107, 110.

actually going into their own historical past . . . . I think that's one of the ways in which people who had never acted before were able to do this essential acting thing, which is to lose yourself in your character, feel like they *are* this person, and the Inuit are like that all the time.<sup>62</sup>

The relationship between Inuit naming practices and acting deconstructs the binary opposition between imagined and essential (or blood) identities, bringing us back to Vizenor's notion of the pose as constitutive of both self-identification and outsiders' representations. Reincarnation offers a powerful metaphor for both the content of *Atanarjuat* and its production, representing what Gerald Vizenor calls 'a new incarnation of native presence' that revises the figurative and material 'vanishing Indians' of Hollywood filmmaking.<sup>63</sup> Catherine Russell suggests further that 'performative doubling' in *War Canoes* – the slippage between 'real' and representation when amateur actors pose as their ancestors – challenges both the politics of salvage ethnography and the universal humanist aesthetic which 'subjugates the ethnic subject to the authority of realism'.<sup>64</sup> Bill Holm and George Quimby also point out that Curtis was obliged by the Kwakwaka'wakw community to match the social status of the actors and their roles, making the casting of his film extremely complex and specific to a local, tribal reading of the project. Yet the narrative dependence on the concept and consequences of naming and spiritual kinship in *Atanarjuat* reframes the discussion of realism because the very 'disappearance' of the actor into the role forces the viewer to engage not with Euro-American narratives of technologically inept, vanishing primitives, but with Inuit cultural narratives, dramatic idioms and family systems. The acting thus also moves the community members of Igloolik closer to their own models of cultural performance. The filmmakers then pointedly pull the viewer away from this unification of actor and role during the credits, loosening the film's ties to realism through its final focus on the methods and mechanics of simulation.

Vizenor's understanding of the paradoxical nature of indigenous 'simulations of survivance' is also helpful in thinking through Kunuk and Cohn's use of ethnographic materials in *Atanarjuat*. In order to recreate precontact Inuit life in Igloolik, the filmmakers turned to the earliest existing records of contact from the British Royal Navy expedition to the area in the winter of 1822–3 in search of the Northwest Passage. From Captain William Parry and co-Captain George Lyon's diaries and sketches, Kunuk and Cohn took the designs for clothes, tattoos and implements, even replicating a kayak that Parry had sent to the British Museum. The expedition documents were their 'blueprint' for the material artefacts, Cohn said:

In fact, a lot of the authenticity of the film is based on re-creating precisely the world that the British Navy found in 1822, on the assumption that that's the world that hadn't changed for about a thousand years. And of course that's essential for the Inuit audience because . . . we don't really see ourselves or the film in the backtrail of

the history of cinema . . . we're not [in the] Martin Scorsese and D.W. Griffith tradition, we're in the Inuit storytelling tradition. This story's been told hundreds of times through generations of the past, and if we do our job it will be told hundreds of times in the future, and in every instance, if the details aren't right, we're not doing our job . . . Historically . . . the only way information ever got passed forward is in the details. So it's true that foreign filmmakers can use styrofoam igloos because they don't really care and they can say well, it's not really an important part of the story. But we care, because our film is designed to teach future generations, to make sure they know how to build igloos, or sealskin tents, or make these costumes. So our authenticity . . . comes out of having quite a different mission than just making a film. The fact that we do that . . . seems to make the film more entertaining—more convincing to a wider audience—is an interesting thing to discover—that universality is also in a way tied to an authenticity of detail.<sup>65</sup>

David MacDougall similarly attributes investment in detail with a film's ability to transcend cultural specificity and access what is universal in human experience—a phenomenon he calls transcultural cinema. He emphasizes the basic communicability of culture, the permeability of its boundaries rather than the boundaries themselves. My point is that, without the Inuit narrative structure and control over production, *The Fast Runner* could have resembled the 'authentic' or 'pro-Indian' films in the tradition of *The Vanishing American* (George B. Seitz, 1925), shot on location in Monument Valley. Michael Mann, for instance, invested enormous energy and financial resources in the accurate reproduction of the visual and material texture of eighteenth-century colonial life in his 1992 film version of *The Last of the Mohicans*, but he marshals these credible details in service of James Fenimore Cooper's tale of noble savages, who, doomed to die, willingly bequeath the continent to worthy whites. Alternatively, one can imagine an 'authenticity' located outside of material historical detail, and indeed Shelley Niro's comic film *Honey Moccasin* (1998) features a scene in which Mohawk teenagers model powwow costumes with traditional designs and novel materials (including bottle caps, tire rubber and other recyclables).

Many current Native American filmmakers concentrate on filming the process of storytelling itself, thus returning with visual media to long-standing problems in translating oral performance to page, indigenous language to English, context to text. Victor Masayesva uses his training as a still photographer and his skills of composition to translate the artistry of the story in his visual representation of the storytelling event. His 1984 documentary *Itam Hakim, Hopiit/We, Someone, the Hopi* depicts elder Ross Macaya telling stories of personal, clan and tribal history to an audience of four young boys. Many of his most beautiful shots are extremely slow-paced, and he uses techniques such as racking focus and posterization to render natural images – corn rows, corn

66 Quoted in Steven Leuthold, *Indigenous Aesthetics: Native Art Media and Identity* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998), p. 48.

kernels and aspen trees – as abstract. Masayesva makes videos in Hopi for a Hopi audience and asserts that indigenous filmmakers have an aesthetic that ‘begins in the sacred’ and that is grounded in ‘accountability as an individual, as a clan, as a tribal, as a family member’.<sup>66</sup>

Masayesva’s belief in accountability and restraint in filmmaking leads him away from Hollywood and documentary practices intent on answering questions and revealing information. For example, *Itam Hakim, Hopiit* opens not with an establishing shot of the landscape or a head-shot of the storyteller Ross Macaya, but instead with a medium-shot of Macaya’s feet, clad in worn Converse sneakers, as he walks out to fetch water. Later closeups allow the viewer to see Macaya’s face and several times in the film Masayesva employs extreme closeups, racking focus and slow panning to depict the faces of the young listeners in detail. Masayesva’s images of the telling itself and of the Hopi landscape resonate with events in the stories, fusing story, teller and listeners through visual correspondence. The ancient story of the Hopi emergence through the centre of a bamboo reed (the sipapu) resonates visually with the small circular images of the full moon, a bubble blown by a child chewing gum and a hole in the wall behind storyteller Ross Macaya’s face as it slowly comes into focus. The images give Macaya a cosmic profile while situating the story in the present lives of Hopi youth.

These Native filmmakers return to and repatriate ‘old stories’, relocating ethnographic practices and Hollywood discourses to Native nations through visual representation of storytelling as a social practice. They expose the ‘fables of rapport’ which have concealed the production situations, ethnographer/informant relationships and recording and filmmaking apparatus that characterized early ethnographic and popular representations.<sup>67</sup> Using generative cultural stories, they have again taken possession of objects and images that originated in Native communities, but which over decades became fused with Euro-American scenarios. At the same time, they narrate an alternative ‘rapport’ between children and grandparents, contemporary listeners and ancestors, in the storytelling context and content: Panikpak, Atuat and Kumaglaq; Ross Macaya and his audience of Hopi youth. Their films contest earlier power dynamics by locating the Native partner in a position of authority (such as director and producer) and their productions work to renew and revive ‘old stories’ by locating them in modern times and familiar places. Ultimately, the indigenous reconstruction and dramatization of tribal stories on screen reconnect Native audiences with early tellers, translators and actors such as George Hunt and Allakariallak, and return to these ancestors as storytellers in their own right.

67 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 40.

# Performing memory on television: documentary and the 1960s

MYRA MACDONALD

- 1 For exceptions, see Andrew Hoskins, 'New memory: mediating history', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2001), pp. 333–46 and *Televising War: from Vietnam to Iraq* (London: Continuum, 2004).
- 2 Annette Kuhn defines 'memory work' as 'an active practice of remembering which takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory'. 'A journey through memory', in Susannah Radstone (ed.), *Memory and Methodology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 186.
- 3 Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 4.
- 4 See, for example, 'Special debate on trauma and screen studies', *Screen*, vol. 42, no. 2 (2001), pp. 188–216; Barbie Zelizer (ed.), *Visual Culture and the Holocaust* (London: Athlone Press, 2001); Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (eds), *Contested Pasts: the Politics of Memory* (London: Routledge, 2003).
- 5 Marita Sturken's definition of 'cultural memory' in *Tangled Memories: the Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), p. 1.

Despite the rapidly increasing literature on social and cultural memory within film and cultural studies, television has been relatively neglected.<sup>1</sup> Yet television regularly forges cultural memories through its celebration of heritage and national commemorations, its recycling of programmes across generational divides, its forays into 'history', and its sometimes incestuous invoking of its own role in the construction of a national 'past'. Television documentary, unlike mainstream film, purports to bring us the testimony of those capable of remembering earlier eras, but sets this within a framework of commentary and archive footage. By focusing on recollections of the 1960s, this article explores how the performance of memory on British television is inflected by televisual codes and conventions that act both to vivify but also to constrict 'memory work'.<sup>2</sup> By offering viewers 'ordinary' memories of life in periods of rapid social and cultural change, or at moments of public disaster, television has the potential to make visible the 'web of interconnections' binding together 'public' history and 'personal' memory.<sup>3</sup> Critical writing on processes of memory construction within film and photography has tended to concentrate on trauma memories and witnessing.<sup>4</sup> My emphasis, in line with television's greater interest in the everyday, is on its production of 'cultural memory' of the sixties, and in particular on the 'cultural negotiation through which different stories vie for a place in history'.<sup>5</sup>

The period of the sixties has been chosen for a variety of reasons. Mythologized through popular culture as an era of revolutionary protest and social, political and cultural change, this decade was also the first to bring constructions of its unfolding persona to a mass audience. By 1960,

6 Barbie Zelizer, *Covering the Body: the Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 27; *The Listener*, 18 April 1963, p. 695.

7 James D. Halloran, Philip Elliott and Graham Murdock, *Demonstrations and Communication: a Case Study* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), considered the contribution of television cameras to the violence that became the focus of media reporting of the London demonstration against the Vietnam war in October 1968.

8 *Time*, 15 April 1966. Cover available at: <http://www.time.com/time/coversearch> (accessed 8 June 2005).

9 Sheila Rowbotham, *Promise of a Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (London: Allen Lane, 2000), p. 118.

10 *The Listener*, 26 October 1967, p. 530.

11 *Sunday Times*, 20 July 1969, <http://www.mediawatchuk.org> (accessed 1 July 2005).

88% of US homes owned a television set and, by 1963, 88.4% of the British population was able to receive television programmes.<sup>6</sup> British television was shedding its 1950s sedateness, stimulated both by the advent of ITV and, at the BBC, by Sir Hugh Carleton Greene's activities as Director-General. While technological improvements facilitated television spectacles (such as the funeral of President Kennedy in 1963, or the moon landing in 1969), the increasing use of colour by the end of the decade added a new dimension to television's illusion of instantaneous realism. Television was becoming reflexive about its own role in fostering the mood of the times and debate about its capacity to shape the reality it was claiming 'merely to document' was being initiated in academic writing.<sup>7</sup> In British cinema, too, the 1960s marked a new focus on contemporary 'northern' working-class life, while, for the young, popular music became the primary means of forging a powerful sense of generational distinctiveness.

These developments prompted reflexivity about what the sixties might mean within that decade itself. Two of the defining terms – 'the swinging sixties' and 'the permissive society' – were already in use before the sixties ended. American journalist Piri Halasz initiated 'swinging London' in a *Time* magazine cover in 1966.<sup>8</sup> Although, in Sheila Rowbotham's words, 'always an external definition and regarded as a joke', this slogan did, she contends, 'catch something that was happening ... some process of interaction between music, art and fashion'.<sup>9</sup> Revealingly, metropolitan specificity quickly gave way to temporal diffusion, in a manner that masked differences between the metropolis and 'provinces' and between affluent and non-affluent classes. The provenance of the other catchphrase definition of the sixties, 'the permissive society', is more obscure, but references to this appear in Marc's cartoon 'Life and Times in NW1' in *The Listener* in 1967.<sup>10</sup> Roy Jenkins, responsible as Home Secretary for liberalizing legislation in relation to homosexuality and abortion in the late sixties, in 1969 also rejected the pejorative connotations settling around use of the term:

The permissive society – always a misleading description – has been allowed to become a dirty phrase. A better phrase is the civilised society, a society based on the belief that different individuals will wish to make different decisions about their patterns of behaviours.<sup>11</sup>

The focus of moral concerns centred on the loosening of controls on sexuality and on 'obscurity'. Even if myths of the sixties did not congeal until later, the processes of myth-making were well underway in the decade itself. Memories of this era, even for those who lived through it, cannot escape the influence of its mediation through popular cultural forms.

Cultural and film studies have conceptualized memory's *modus operandi* in a variety of ways. With most commentators now agreeing that memory, however individualized in its articulation, is always a



12 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1992, first published 1925, 1941).

13 James Fentress and Chris Wickham, *Social Memory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992).

14 Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Vol. 1 Past and Present in Contemporary Culture* (London: Verso, 1994).

15 Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, p. 20.

16 The concept has been explored especially by Alison Landsberg. See her 'Prosthetic memory: *Total Recall* and *Blade Runner*', in Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (eds), *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment* (London: Sage, 1995), pp. 175–89 and 'Prosthetic memory: the ethics and politics of memory in an age of mass culture', in Paul Grainge (ed.), *Memory and Popular Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 144–61.

17 Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (London: Bantam Books, 1993), pp. xiii, 3.

social and cultural process, a diversity of terms have been deployed to explain this process. Maurice Halbwachs advocates the notion of 'collective memory', adopting a Durkheimian perspective to argue that memory emerges only within collective contexts, its permutations arising from the kaleidoscopic realignment of differing social groups.<sup>12</sup> James Fentress and Chris Wickham prefer to describe memory as 'social', contending that this more accurately attributes agency to its formation.<sup>13</sup> For Raphael Samuel, 'popular memory' articulated through the hand-me-down histories of folk-song and ballads, or practices such as miners' galas, exists in contradistinction to 'official memory', inscribed through institutional documentation.<sup>14</sup> By keeping alive alternative ideologies, 'popular memory' has the capacity to challenge established hierarchies.

The concept of 'cultural memory', which provides the framework for this article, avoids the suggestion, embedded in some of these terms, that memory is an entity, shared by a particular group. It emphasizes memory's operation as a process: never static, but open to constant reconfiguration in line with evolving personal and cultural circumstances. Acknowledging the inevitability of a conflict over interpretations of the past, it draws our attention to the interactions between culture and subjectivity in the formation of that contest. 'Cultural memory' also testifies to the complexities of disentangling where our memories come from: whether from direct experience, oft-repeated accounts by friends or family, or from the mediation of the popular media. As Marita Sturken observes, 'Some Vietnam veterans say they have forgotten where some of their memories came from – their own experiences, documentary photographs, or Hollywood movies.'<sup>15</sup> The concept of 'prosthetic memory' – memories synthetically produced which nevertheless acquire the familiarity of being grafted onto our own memory bank – graphically encapsulates the melding of memories 'owned' through direct experience with memories originating from encounters with a variety of popular cultural forms.<sup>16</sup>

Dominant memories of the sixties have settled around discourses of dissent and youthful rebelliousness. Epitomizing the tendency to 'begin as surprises and end as clichés' that typifies all periods of profound change, the 1960s 'scooped together' 'a collage of fragments ... as if a whole decade took place in an instant'.<sup>17</sup> Whether from memory or mediated images, signifiers of widespread public unrest such as the civil rights movement in the USA, the growing opposition to America's involvement in the Vietnam war, the troubled reactions to nuclear weapons and an increasing internationalization of student protest have all blended together. The development of the contraceptive pill, the increasing affluence and assertiveness of young people and the growing counter-culture provided the evidence for an apparent sexual revolution. While these developments form the mythology of sixties' memories, life for many who lived through that era was very differently configured and only indirectly touched by these developments. Writing in *New Society* in 1969, Bernard Davies comments on the disparity between television's

18 Bernard Davies, 'Non-swinging youth', *New Society*, no. 352 (3 July 1969).

19 See Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 199.

20 Hodgkin and Radstone (eds), *Contested Pasts*, p. 1.

21 Alessandro Portelli, 'The massacre at the Fosse Ardeatine: history, myth, ritual, and symbol', in Hodgkin and Radstone (eds), *Contested Pasts*, pp. 29–41.

image of young people on *Top of the Pops* (BBC 1964–2006) and the youngsters watching this programme on television in a Lancashire youth club.<sup>18</sup> Lifestyle changes at this time percolated slowly from metropolitan centres to the world beyond, and the radicalism of the student population was both more patchy and more location-specific than its ability to catch the eye of the camera would suggest.

In emphasizing contest over meaning, 'cultural memory' relates memory to structures of power. Recollections of the past become part of the struggle over identity and the claiming of voice. This has been graphically documented in the reaffirmation of Holocaust testimonials against the claims of the deniers.<sup>19</sup> Within television documentary, production decisions about who speaks play an important part in what gets remembered and what gets forgotten about the sixties. As Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone observe, 'The focus of contestation . . . is very often not conflicting accounts of what actually happened in the past so much as the question of who or what is entitled to speak for that past in the present'.<sup>20</sup> Alessandro Portelli has documented how forcefully the present impacts on remembrance of the past in his account of local people's rewriting of the massacre at the Fosse Ardeatine in 1944 to blame the Italian resistance-fighters rather than the German military. This apparently aberrant act of recall can be explained, he suggests, only by understanding the strong anti-Communist sentiments current at the time of his investigations.<sup>21</sup>

All of the memories of the sixties that I have investigated come from the 'present' of the 1990s. Why that decade witnessed such a revival of interest in the 1960s is a subject for investigation in its own right, but reasons might include reaction against the repression of the Thatcher era in Britain and the sexual retrenchment of the post-AIDS climate, spiced by nostalgia amongst a generation of programme-makers for the era of their own youth. The increasingly competitive environment that followed the Broadcasting Act of 1990 had its own impact, encouraging documentary-makers to navel gaze by preferring accessible British topics over in-depth or international investigative reporting. Echoes of the sixties were also reverberating in other popular cultural forms, with CD reissues of 1960s hits, the commercialization of annual festivals such as Glastonbury, and films such as Oliver Stone's *JFK* (1991) and Spike Lee's *Malcolm X* (1992) creating a fresh interest in the politics of the transatlantic scene. Whatever the reasons, the selection of memories in the documentaries discussed below owes much to the version of the 1960s that the 1990s thought fit to promote.

'Cultural memory' provides a valuable overarching paradigm for this analysis, but it is insufficiently discriminating to account for the differences between memory evoked spontaneously in face-to-face communication, and memory selected and produced through the specific requirements of televisual codes and conventions. Annette Kuhn, in her ethnohistorical study of 1930s cinema audiences' recollections, draws helpful distinctions between the varying ways of 'doing memory work'

22 Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), p. 9.

23 Ibid., pp. 9–11.

24 Ibid., p. 10.

25 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the philosophy of history', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970), p. 257.

and 'staging' or 'performing' memory amongst her participants.<sup>22</sup> She distinguishes between anecdotal (or autobiographical) memory, repetitive memory (discussing personal experience in terms of habitual practices – 'what we used to do'), impersonal memory (memories that circumvent personal experiences) and past/present memories (producing fluctuating accounts of the relation between 'then' and 'now' that are indicative of deeper engagement with the remembering process).<sup>23</sup> In Kuhn's work, these relate to direct methods of relaying memories, mediated only by the research process. Even so, the dominance in her study of 'repetitive' memory is likely to have been conditioned by the participants' understanding that the research process invited recollections with collective validity.

Within television documentaries, further conditions apply to shape the performance of memory work. From the process of selecting participants, to the establishment of location, choice of interview method, filming and editing conventions, memories on television are 'staged' within particular parameters. In order to explore these further, I will consider the performing of television memories in terms of narrational style, bodily expressiveness, physical location and distance or proximity to the object of recollection. Kuhn's 'past/present' mode of performing memory, in which 'informants, usually unaware of doing so, shift or "shuttle" back and forth between past and present standpoints' is especially nuanced by television documentary's use of commentary and editing practices, most especially when these interleave memories with archive footage or images.<sup>24</sup> The latter part of this article will consider how these constrain or open up the interrogative capacity of witnesses' memory work. In Walter Benjamin's words, 'To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it "the way it really was" . . . . It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger.'<sup>25</sup> Memory is most interesting when it raises more questions than it can answer. Whether the confines of the television documentary enable or limit that capacity will determine its ability to challenge the hegemony of what the sixties have come to mean.

In any verbal performance of memory, the style of narration communicates a great deal about the processes of memory evocation. Features such as pace, hesitations or a sudden rush of recollection, emphasis and voice tone indicate both the degree of comfort or discomfort that particular memories evoke and the complexities of the emotions being aroused. Television has the advantage over oral history of allowing us seemingly direct access to non-verbal and paralinguistic cues. Yet it is rare for interviewees to be granted more than a maximum of one to two minutes of airtime before an edit diverts us towards some other source. Even in the process of narration, cutaway shots act as punctuators of the original rhythm of delivery. Interviewers' questions and prompts are habitually removed, so that we gain no sense of the interaction underlying the formation of recollections. The oral

historian Luisa Passerini notes the crucial role played by the interviewer in any memory work:

Since the interview is always the result of two subjectivities which meet . . . *corps-a-corps*, our place in the construction of memory is essential. Such construction is possible only on the basis of empathy.<sup>26</sup>

Alessandro Portelli comments that the historian acts ‘as an “organizer” of the testimony – and organization . . . is not technical, it is political’.<sup>27</sup>

The notion of memory as contingent, and elicited – sometimes hesitatingly – through interactive and social exchange is replaced in television by the solidity of coherent sound-bites delivered seemingly spontaneously to camera.

Oral historians have discovered the benefits of the collective exchanging of memories in ‘witness seminars’, but television documentaries rarely depart from their customary preference for ‘serial monoglossia’, interweaving a number of individual remembrances around a shared theme.<sup>28</sup> In the documentaries I surveyed from the 1990s relating specifically to the sixties, I found no examples of interaction between participants, but in one of the *Century Road* series (a pre-millennial BBC series that imaginatively surveyed contemporary and past life in a number of streets of this name), there is an exchange between two women and the interviewer about attitudes to single women who became pregnant outside marriage in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The friends are filmed together on the street in medium-long shot, sharing reminiscences about how quickly they were married off once they were discovered to be pregnant. Tapping her friend on the arm, with a conversational ‘And it was ever so funny, Sylvia’, Pam Cook relates with graphic humour how the grandeur of the taxi supplied for her wedding contrasted with its dilapidated state inside (‘I could see the road’). A recollection of the food at their receptions prompts a sudden change of mood:

Pam Cook: We catered, well my mum catered for quite a number – I can’t remember exactly who now, but (eh) very sadly they didn’t turn up.

Sylvia Staniland: Oh!

Interviewer: Why not?

Pam Cook: I don’t know. I don’t know. They just didn’t.

Sylvia Staniland: Oh dear!

Pam Cook: There was (eh) Jeff’s mum and dad came, his brother and, his brother and his sister and my father was ill – he was in bed at the time – (eh) there was my youngest, my sister and my brother (um).

Interviewer: Do you think it was because they didn’t approve? That’s why they didn’t come?

Pam Cook: Um. I feel, I . . . It’s never been said, but yes.<sup>29</sup>

26 Luisa Passerini, ‘Report on “memory” (final session of International Conference on Oral History, Aix-en-Provence 26 September 1982)’, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 15 (1983), p. 195.

27 Alessandro Portelli, ‘The peculiarities of oral history’, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 12 (1981), p. 105.

28 Myra Macdonald, ‘Politicizing the personal: women’s voices in British television documentaries’, in Cynthia Carter, Gillian Branson and Stuart Allan (eds), *News, Gender and Power* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 107.

29 ‘Passing Trains’, from Retford, Nottinghamshire (*Century Road* series), BBC2, 23 January 1999.

This personal vignette reveals much about social class, moral codes and notions of respectability prevailing at the time, but it emerges by chance out of a conversational exchange. Although it requires the prompting of the interviewer to anchor its social significance, his role is more that of a third interlocutor than a controlling voice and our ability to hear his intervention brings into evidence the intersection between personal and public histories.

Witnesses on television are generally denied full authorial control over their autobiographical recollections but they do nevertheless demonstrate variegated storytelling techniques. Sometimes, complete mini-narratives recreate background, dialogue, suspense and conclusion in a manner that brings accompanying archive footage to life. In 'Half the People' (*People's Century*, BBC1, 26 January 1997), Joyce Wheedon, a leading player in the strike by women machinists at Ford's Dagenham plant in 1968 (they were paid 20% less than their male colleagues), recounts her role in initiating the walk-out:

We'd been getting nowhere with our arguments. It was just 'they're women, they're just getting in a dander, they'll calm down soon, they're just getting a bee in their bonnet'. Nobody was sure of what they were going to do and one of the girls said to me 'Are we going out, or should we wait till?' And I just picked up me bag, switched the machine off, put me scissors in me bag and said 'Right, I've stopped work. Who's coming?' And one hundred and eighty seven women closed the Ford plant down.

The re-dramatization of this episode suggests an often-repeated account, with clearly demarcated positioning of the key players. In its confident and unhesitating delivery, its reporting of direct speech, its temporal elision, its compressed narrative form with clear beginning, middle and end, it tells us little about the *process* of memory work, however graphically it recreates the intersection of personal and public spheres. The effort to synchronize testimony and archive footage, to overlay 'then' with 'now', does, however, impede fuller exploration of that intersection. As we watch Joyce Wheedon, on archive film, participating in the campaign committee and the lobbying of parliament, we are given a hint of her own political transformation in her voiceover commentary: 'The biggest surprise of all was when I found myself on a march and protest rally along the Embankment'. This slickly edited sequence, with its privileging of the visual interest of film extracts, disappointingly leaves no space to probe further into *how* this woman became so unexpectedly politicized.

In 'Double Lives' (the second part of BBC2's series on 'lesbian and gay history', *It's Not Unusual*, 25 May 1997), the witnesses are given more space between edits than is typical for television documentaries to tell their own stories. In the following vignette, storytelling departs from a linear structure, cutting in, instead, to the core of the changing mores of the times through an epiphany-style subjective revelation. Luchia

Fitzgerald, who came to the north of England from Ireland in the early 1960s, tells with some humour how she discovered her lesbianism and the existence of a world in Manchester to which she could belong, but also how that world pushed her into adopting a butch identity against her will. Her joy at the opening up of less rigidly defined butch/femme roles in the late sixties is recreated in her account of a particular memory moment (*italics indicate emphasis*):

I overheard a conversation (eh) with some girls at the back o' me and they were dressed a little bit peculiar really they had (eh) an odd smell of them – whatever kind of oil it was – petulie oil, I thought their clothes was damp and that they were living in cellars and stuff like that and they had these (eh, eh) these shirts on with (eh) little mirrors in and their hair was long and I wondered if they were lesbians actually to be perfectly honest wi' you, but y'know we soon established that they were and stuff like that, and (eh) that they were talking (eh) about how ghettoized people are, and the butch and the femme thing is not right, and and really speaking we could do really with enjoying being a woman and all this type of thing without having to dress up as men and *oh* I thought all my birthdays come at once. I thought 'ere we go. This is *music* to my ears.

This evocation of a moment of memory signals a shift in cultural attitudes that is achieved through the sensual recall of details of smells, dress and hair styles and the reproduction of overheard snippets of conversation, all addressed conversationally to an implied interlocutor ('to be perfectly honest wi' you'), conveyed through the subjectivity of the narrator ('I wondered if they were lesbians'), and culminating in a vivid metaphor ('I thought all my birthdays come at once'). Filmed in closeup, with no cutaway shots, the speaker retains a measure of authorial control.

Even in observational documentary, those who participate inevitably become 'social actors', performing their social roles on camera. In the process of memory evocation, corporeal responses are especially revelatory.<sup>30</sup> Distinctions have been drawn, in relation to trauma memories, between memories that can be represented, and memories that remain as unspoken, sensory memories, felt and expressed through the body. Jill Bennett, adopting the terminology of Charlotte Delbo, a French poet and Holocaust survivor, refers to the latter as 'sense memories', involving 'not so much *speaking of* but *speaking out of* a particular memory or experience – in other words, speaking from the body *sustaining sensation*'.<sup>31</sup> In *Shoah* (1985), Claude Lanzmann deliberately sets up the conditions to prompt this response from his interviewees, using his own variegated forms of interviewing style (always audible to viewers) to tease confessions or memories out of those reluctant to take this journey in public. His reported aim was to produce not a documentary but a performance of memory.<sup>32</sup> Television, with its routine conventions of filming interviewees in closeup, at an oblique angle to a

30 Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 42.

31 Jill Bennett, 'The aesthetics of sense-memory: theorising trauma through the visual arts', in Susannah Radstone and Katharine Hodgkin (eds), *Regimes of Memory* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 33.

32 Ernst van Alphen, 'Deadly historians: Boltanski's intervention in Holocaust historiography', in Zelizer (ed.), *Visual Culture*, p. 47.

relatively static camera, and with its often rehearsed process of interaction elided, offers fewer opportunities for *speaking out of* experience in the more general recovery of memory.

As with narrational style, it is difficult to disentangle spontaneity in memory work from its framing by televisual requirements. The play between the personality of the interviewee and the conditions of television's production is rarely open to scrutiny, but traces at least are evident when the same witness reappears in different documentaries. Maureen Delenian features in both 'The Pill: prescription for revolution' (*TimeWatch*, BBC2, 10 March 1993) and 'Virgins' (first part of a C4 series, *Sex Bomb*, 14 October 1998). Both programmes review the 'sexual revolution' of the sixties, the first tracing the evolution of attitudes to the contraceptive pill, the second exploring, more broadly, the changing sexual mores of the decade. In each, Delenian testifies to the liberating and revolutionary quality of the pill, but in the first documentary she 'speaks of' her memories, whereas in the second she 'speaks out of' them. Even allowing for changes in her own life over a five-year period, this difference suggests a stronger rapport and sense of ease between herself and her interviewer in the later example that enables her to claim, however momentarily, a more forceful personal voice.

In 'The Pill', Maureen Delenian's recollections move through Kuhn's 'autobiographical', 'repetitive' and then 'impersonal' modes, as personal account slips into generic reflection. Filmed in medium closeup, her voice tone lacks modulation and her body remains static, although a knowing smile accompanies her last sentence. Brief cutaway shots of old colour photographs of her at the time, both on her own and with her partner, punctuate her short account:

I know that when my marriage was starting to break up I certainly had a lover, that being on the pill guaranteed me that I at least wasn't going to get pregnant by that man. But I think the idea that you could control your fertility, you could go outside of a marital relationship, and you could start to develop in other ways, all came along at the same time. It was a revolution in a very real sense of the word for women that they felt that once they could control their fertility there may be other areas of their life that they could control with equal ease.

In 'Virgins', on the other hand, dispassionate narration gives way to embodied reliving of remembered experience. In relating her first orgasm (with her lover) after going on the pill, Delenian both verbalizes and performs her bodily delight (*italics indicate emphasis in speech*):

I *wanted* this man to make love to me. I *wanted* it. I wanted it so *desperately* I could feel my *skin* creeping over his, I mean, and it was *there*, I mean, that was what the first orgasm was for me, it was like, I don't know, how can I, it's like a *shining* from *inside*. It was it was just – uh – and this is what – whoah – thirty odd years ago and I still feel it – it's wonderful.



The excitement of her delivery is orchestrated through bodily movement. When finally lighting on the ‘shining from inside’ analogy, after some fumbling for appropriate words, she raises her hands excitedly in the air, and leans forward out of frame. The ‘whoah’ is accompanied by a wink to the interviewer, as she relishes the recollection, and her ‘I still feel it’ produces a joyful screwing up of her eyes. Unlike her self-presentation in *TimeWatch*, when she situates her personal memory reflectively within a social frame, this narration manifests a recovery of desire, both verbally and visually. By embodying her memory, she endorses the intensity of transformation that the pill signified for many, and gives life to the ‘revolution’ that she asserts, in both documentaries, to have been its consequence.

Specificity of place acts as a powerful stimulus of memory, and yet the process of remembering can paradoxically produce an acute sense of spatial and temporal displacement. The frequent intensity of disputes about detail of location confirms how graphically place is rewritten across time. Discussions about ‘setting’ in family photographs are not merely debates about accuracy of recollection, but contests over interpretations about human relationships and their evolving formation.<sup>33</sup> The ‘uncanniness of being at once the same and different, at once time and space’ characterizes the dual vividness of evocations of physical place with their dreamlike refusal to be contained within a particular time.<sup>34</sup> Television documentaries, by routinely filming interviewees against interior backdrops that lack precise indices of cultural or geographical context, miss opportunities to experiment with the interactions between place and memory. Interviewees are rarely transported back to the site of their memories, or a reconstituted equivalent, in the manner of Lanzmann’s famous sequence in *Shoah* (1985), when he places a Jewish barber, responsible for cutting the hair of those who were about to be gassed at Treblinka, in an ordinary barber’s shop in Israel to resurrect his memories. When this does, exceptionally, occur, it evokes a different form of remembering from that elicited in domestic or studio interview.

In ‘The Pill’, one of the participants, Kathleen Duffy, provides a buoyant ‘repetitive’ reflection when interviewed in an anonymous interior setting about the consonance between the pill and its era: ‘we had moon landings, we had mini-skirts, everything was an atmosphere of freedom, so the pill really did fit in absolutely marvellously with that’. This contrasts with her earlier appearance on a terraced street relating her experience of an illegal abortion in the mid 1960s. Commenting initially on the feelings of alienation prompted by her return – ‘it’s all changed, it’s different’ – she recounts the secrecy attending her earlier visit, and the fear she experienced. ‘I had my boyfriend with me and we were both quite nervous’ is accompanied by a clasping of her stomach as if in a somatic reprise of her emotions at that time, and eventually she breaks down saying ‘it’s very strange coming back. It’s, I didn’t expect it to affect me quite like it has’. Her response echoes Annette Kuhn’s

<sup>33</sup> For a moving account of this, see Annette Kuhn’s memory work on her family photograph album in *Family Secrets*, especially pp. 11–15.

<sup>34</sup> Hodgkin and Radstone (eds), *Contested Pasts*, p. 11.

observation that ‘memory . . . is at once emplaced and embodied’.<sup>35</sup> Even allowing for the possible artifice of this sequence, the location prompts the recovery of emotions that would more probably remain suppressed in an interview set in a domestic interior connoting comfort and familiarity rather than the continuing rawness of the past.

An acute memory of place (whether actual or processed through intervening emotions) often features strongly in trauma memories. In a *TimeWatch* programme on the Aberfan disaster in October 1966 (‘Remember Aberfan’, BBC2, 15 October 1996), archive footage from contemporary news and current affairs programmes records the visible aftermath of the collapse of an old coal tip onto the village of Aberfan, which submerged the primary school and several houses, killing 116 children and 28 adults, but these clearly located film extracts visualize the horror less graphically than this parent’s vivid eyewitness recollection:

I can see the farm now. I can see the chickens coming through the roof. That was in the yard of the school. The farm was carried down the mountain and it was in the school yard and the slurry was all around it and the chickens is coming out through the roof, flyin’, and the stuff was still moving.

A teacher, with equal expression of amazement, recalls the extraordinary sight of a boulder spinning towards the school on the edge of his frame of vision. The precision of detail may or may not be wholly ‘accurate’, but it vividly evokes the intensity of feeling of these particular moments in time.

The relations between past and present and the shuttling between then and now are especially vivid in memories of trauma. Memory typically refuses linearity, preferring ellipses, fades, flashbacks and jump cuts that bring it, as several commentators have pointed out, into synergy with the visual language of film.<sup>36</sup> Yet, in its production for television, a sense of linearity is frequently manufactured by commentary and editing conventions. Witnesses, in their performance of memory, make their own contribution to a sense of the past as complete and remote, or as still to be negotiated in the present. The degree of impersonality in some recounting of the past traduces memory work by turning remembering into a form of explanation or justification. In the episode of the *People’s Century* series devoted to youthful protest in the late 1960s (‘New Release’ in UK version, BBC1, 19 January 1997; ‘Young Blood’ in the USA), David Triesman recalls an occupation at the University of Essex to protest against its invitation to a defence industry scientist despite the intensity of antiwar feeling at the time. As a former student activist (now Lord Triesman, but at the time of filming the general secretary of the AUT), he is featured in the preceding archive sequence playing a leading role in this dispute, yet his mode of recall is distant and impersonal:

The real anger and distress about the Vietnam war meant that (eh) if speakers came (eh) to a university like Essex who were deeply

36 See Richard Terdiman’s reference to memory’s ‘fluky links and stochastic jump-cuts’, in ‘Given memory: on mnemonic coercion, reproduction, and invention’, in Radstone and Hodgkin (eds), *Regimes of Memory*, p. 186.

involved in biological and chemical warfare, students were going to protest and that is indeed what the protest was about.

His personal involvement is abnegated in his use of abstract nouns ('anger', 'distress', 'the protest'), impersonal nouns ('students') and distancing labels ('a university like Essex'), in place of any recollections of his feelings or aspirations at the time.

By contrast, the memory work of one of the bereaved parents, Chris Sullivan, in 'Remember Aberfan', demonstrates the lived continuities between past and present. He recalls the impact on this small and remote community of the sudden attention of the world's media (square brackets indicate archive footage of reporters on the street, interviewing passers-by, including, possibly, this parent):

They are all over the place [and when I say that they – from all over the world, literally true. They were round with their notebooks and their pads and asking all these questions – 'how are you getting over it'? and this kind of thing]. Well, I mean, you can't, you cannot, I mean you cannot ask me that question now – never mind 30 years ago. I mean that question you couldn't ask me – or, rather, let me put it this way, then, that I wouldn't ask any of the bereaved that I know now that question today.

The shuttling between historic present, past and present tenses here is a potent confirmation of the continuity of this father's grief, and the projection into a conditional future ('you couldn't ask me') connotes the indefinite extension of the feelings being resurrected. As Alison Landsberg observes, 'Memory . . . is not a means for closure – is not a strategy for closing or finishing the past – but on the contrary, memory emerges as a generative force, a force which propels us not backward but forwards.'<sup>37</sup>

The discussion so far has mapped out some of the conventions through which witnesses' memories are articulated within documentary, but these testimonies struggle for authority against voiceover commentary and compete for attention with archive footage. They also reverberate against each other, amplifying, modifying or dissenting from each documentary's emerging dominant discourse. Commentary in some documentaries plays a discreet and mainly connective and explanatory role, but in many it is more prominently discursive, setting the script within which memories are assigned the role of supporting evidence. The claim of the *People's Century* series that it is committed 'to documenting the extraordinary events of the century through the revealing personal testimony of the people who experienced them firsthand – "no pundits, no academics appear on camera"' is both literally accurate but also misleading.<sup>38</sup> Considerable direction from the narrator remains, especially in establishing a hierarchy of significance between forms of protest ('New Release'), or the primary agents in women's liberation ('Half the People').

Demarcations between forms of rebellion that were frequently interrelated in practice are indexed by visual and soundtrack distinctions

37 Landsberg, 'Prosthetic memory: Total Recall and *Blade Runner*', p. 176.

38 <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/peoplescentury/about> (accessed 2 July 2005).

and accentuated by commentary. Political protest and the search for individual freedom through sex, music or drugs are, in several documentaries, constructed as opposing poles of attraction for sixties' youth. In 'New Release', hippie culture appears as a spectacular interlude within an extensive review of antiwar and civil rights movements in different parts of the world. Voiceover commentary introduces the hippie era as a reaction against political involvement ('But with the war escalating others felt so alienated and disconnected that they simply dropped out'.) This antithesis is sustained in a closing segue into the dominant political protest theme: 'Though many of their concerns were to re-emerge in other forms later, the hippies were a minority. Most young people still wanted to be involved in what was going on around them.' Appearing in archive footage from the sixties, one witness defends hippie culture by underlining the link between differing forms of protest: 'What is happening here in San Francisco is really one of the only meaningful responses to the war and to the whole shock of the system.' Yet his assertion is eclipsed by the framing of the commentary and by his own recollection almost thirty years on: 'It was a dreamy thing, an idealistic thing', even although this testimony also stresses the collective aspirations for social change underlying the hippie movement.

In 'Half the People' Joyce Wheedon's recollections of her role in the Ford machinists' dispute prompts the commentary, 'as a result of the women's action, equal pay became a national issue'. Yet, in its function of enabling smooth transition between topics, the male voiceover proceeds to undermine the achievements of female collective action by claiming the contraceptive pill's superior contribution to women's liberation: 'But it was a scientific breakthrough, not a change in the law, that made the most difference to women's lives'. This discursive capacity of commentary to frame memories within an agenda not of their own making is only occasionally disrupted or reversed. In 'Virgins', the commentary is more responsive to the evidence being presented through the recollection of its participants. Its initial declaration that the sexual revolution 'transformed the intimate life of everyone in Britain today and defeated all those who tried to stand in its way' takes a more qualified form as a witness recollects her traumatic experience in a mother-and-baby home and her enforced giving up of her baby for adoption: 'beyond the metropolis the swinging sixties were a very long time coming'. In 'Double Lives', voiceover narration performs a dual role: contextualizing individual memories but also cueing these in rather than directing them. The commentator's 'most women still found out where lesbians met through chance conversations' acts as prompt for Luchia Fitzgerald's wry and entertaining account of her discovery of a lesbian club in Manchester. A balanced account of the limited shifts in public attitudes to homosexuality in the early sixties similarly segues into two male witnesses' recollections of the perils of 'cottaging'. In this documentary, commentary appears, exceptionally, to be modulated in tune with the primary contributions of the speakers, respecting and validating their

memories. The lengthier than average takes, enabling individuals to develop their own narrational rhythm in recollecting their experiences, confirm the sense that memory takes unusual primacy of place in this documentary.

When Claude Lanzmann decided to exclude archive footage of the Holocaust from *Shoah*, he was asserting the need for memory work to be visible and audible without the distraction of imagery increasingly drained of its original power. Documentaries concerning the 1960s face a related dilemma of how to avoid submerging memories beneath the bank of still images, news and fiction film sequences that form prosthetic memories of the era. Three categories of archive material are routinely interwoven with witness recollections: footage of protest marches; film of popular music festivals; and extracts culled from current affairs, news and documentary programmes (and the occasional film) of the decade. Images of protest demonstrations, predominantly in monochrome, set 'ordinary people' against the forces of the state and include a customary mix of aerial images and action shots of confrontation on the ground. Collage sequences in 'New Release' blend civil rights and antiwar protests across continents in a manner that erodes specificity, but archive footage of identified demonstrations (such as the May demonstrations in Paris in 1968) links individual memory with collective protest, as those recalling the events feature as activists in the archive film. The contrast between youthful protester and current witness is marked by oppositions of action/stasis, open/closed framing, (usually) monochrome/colour and by marked differences of dress and hairstyle. While David Triesman's commentary in 'New Release', documented above, marks an extreme instance of detached recall, remembering in this context tends to explicate or elaborate archive footage, leaving at best marginal space for experiential memory work.

None of those represented as involved in protest movements 'takes an inquiring attitude towards the past and the activity of its (re)construction through memory'.<sup>39</sup> The transformation of a youthful Weatherman, a 1968 Paris protester or a rebellious Vietnam veteran into apparently quiescent middle-aged individuals also remains enigmatic and unexplored. By supporting archive footage, activists' memories endorse media representation of the protests in which they participated and bypass the opportunities such memories might offer to interrogate contemporary media constructions and their subsequent iconic status. The observational style of filming in protest footage conspires to maintain this illusory separation between participant and mediation, revealing only very occasional glimpses of protesters' awareness of the presence of cameras. A rare reflection on the power of media representation is offered in 'Half the People' when a participant, filmed taking part in the 1968 Miss America pageant protest in Atlanta City, comments in voiceover:

We threw bras and girdles and stockings, high high-heeled shoes and cosmetics into the trash can. The press loved it and we learned very early

39 Kuhn, 'A journey through memory', p. 186.

on that the press liked crazy things, so let's use the press. We didn't burn any bras. It would have happened if they'd allowed us to have fire.

This allusion to the protesters' awareness of the value of media publicity, and to the mythologies that ensued, is one of the few insights into witnesses' awareness of their interdependence on the very media representations that now accompany their recollections.

If protest footage is at least associated with specific witnesses' memories, archive film of music festivals is almost entirely detached from any individual remembering and is used generically only, to signify the liberation of the decade. In contrast to the protest film, music festival imagery (whether from Monterey 1967 or British festivals of the late 1960s), is predominantly in colour and regularly reveals participants' awareness of the camera as they gesture to it and perform to catch its attention. Festival footage conjures up a world of psychedelic abandonment through tilting camera-work, zip pans and rapid zooms, revealing images of gyrating bodies, drug-taking and sex, to the accompaniment of well-known lyrics from the sixties such as The Who's *I Can See for Miles* and Miles ('Virgins'), The Youngbloods' *Get Together* and Jefferson Airplane's *Somebody to Love* (*People's Century*). Generally celebratory of the supposed sexual liberation of the period, identical extracts from film of a British music festival recur in 'Double Lives', 'Virgins' and 'Love Child,' but only in 'Love Child' is this footage related, exceptionally, to individual (but not participant) memory. This documentary features three women who became pregnant outside marriage, recalling (in synergy with the witness in 'Virgins' referred to above) how they were then sent by their families to mother-and-baby homes and forced to give up their babies for adoption. Against familiar extracts from music festival footage, one of the women sums up her thoughts on the era in the following voiceover reflection:

What do I think was going on? The last-ditch stand of the Victorian morality, I think, to suppress women's sexuality. A feeling of the deserving and the undeserving, but the kind of people who are fit to be mothers and who are not fit to be mothers.

In contrast to the political protest archive, which takes precedence over memory work, this woman's reflective 'past/present' recall offers an acerbic and ironic comment that invites rethinking of the familiar connotations of 'flower power' footage, and also injects a fleeting but timely reminder of class differentials in the experiences of this decade.

While protest and music festival footage prompts prosthetic memories of the decade, extracts from contemporary documentary or current affairs programming provide sharp reminders of the dominant attitudes and ethos of the time. In a rare insight into racism in sixties Britain, an episode from the *Century Road* series ('Tempus Fugit Damn Quick!', BBC2, 30 January 1999), set in the multiracial area of Oldbury, near Birmingham, includes a Jamaican teacher recalling both his personal

experience of racism and the Smethwick by-election in 1964 that became notorious for the racist campaign of the winning Conservative candidate. As Alton Burnett watches himself on an archive television programme, relating a racist incident he experienced shortly after arriving in Britain in 1961, he silently mouths the exchange between himself and a woman who threw a bucket of water over him as he sheltered under her porch. His non-verbal replay, and the bridging of his laughter in the 1960s with his laughter now, counteract the distancing effect of the dated television image and the impersonal character of his comment: 'That's how it was in those days. That was 1961. Very interesting days.' This anecdotal memory is contextualized and amplified by being juxtaposed with extracts from unidentified current affairs programmes of the period, in which a series of individuals, including a parish priest, express overtly racist views on camera or via voiceover, enabling Burnett's subsequent sombre account of the events leading up to the Smethwick by-election to acquire a more intense social resonance.

Maureen Delenian's memories of the liberating effects of the contraceptive pill in the *TimeWatch* programme referred to earlier, acquire a distinctive resonance, despite her bodily restraint, by being set against extracts from *Panorama* and *World in Action* from 1965. In each, voices of male authority reveal patronizing attitudes to women. A male doctor in *World in Action* argues that its association with sexual precociousness makes the pill unattractive to some women: in terms of sexual encounters, women prefer instead 'to be approached by the man, to be persuaded, talked into it, cajoled and coaxed'. This interviewee's received pronunciation tones, the awkwardness of the mise-en-scene (he is filmed facing the camera and fidgeting with an open book on his desk), and the graininess of the monochrome image, all intensify the gap between 'then' and 'now'. When prefaced by this footage, Delenian's narration, although less embodied and intense than her appearance in 'Virgins', accentuates the political challenge that the pill presented at this time to entrenched patriarchal and class constructions of appropriate feminine conduct.

Individual memories, despite their segmentation, interrelate in ways that are sometimes conflicting, sometimes mutually supportive. In 'Virgins', male and female recollections clash in their perspectives on the openness of sexual relationships. A male witness reminisces euphorically:

And the woman wouldn't want it [possessiveness]. I mean, for all you know the woman was into having as many casual relationships as she could get so what right did you have to be possessive about her?

Yet his claim to speak for women is questioned by a direct cut to a woman's testimony:

Possessiveness was uncool because it didn't fit into this liberation theory, and the ideal was that – hey – whoever you met, whoever you wanted, that was cool and whoever you were with would understand



because they were free and you were free. Of course this was absolute nonsense and there was a lot of unhappiness.

On the other hand, in 'Love Child', the editing together of the testimony of three women who shared very similar experiences gives strength and consonance to their reminiscences. Emerging as the dominant discourse, critical of the codes of respectability at the time, these women's voices assert their authority against the counter-memories of the religious authorities who ran many of the mother-and-baby homes. The claim by a Monsignor that he feels no regret about involuntary adoption, because 'at the time it was right', carries little oppositional weight when articulated in the wake of repeated instances of the women's suffering, and their recollections of a church that forbade one of the women from taking communion and required another to arrive at church after – and leave before – the congregation, in order to protect religious sensibilities.

In both 'Virgins' and 'Love Child', the inevitable contest over whose memories are granted primacy in defining particular periods in time is, however briefly, visible, but in most documentaries the process remains hidden. Hegemonic patterns nevertheless prevail. More women than men recall the impact on their lives of the so-called 'sexual revolution', with lesbian or gay perspectives remaining marginalized, or sequestered into programmes specifically about gay sexuality. Memories of public protest are, by contrast, offered mainly by men: the women who testify in 'New Release' comment principally on changing lifestyles or sexual mores. The preferred mode of memory narration also manifests gender distinctions: women are more inclined to offer autobiographical accounts, and to communicate memory through their bodily reactions, whereas men tend to deploy repetitive or impersonal forms of reminiscence, although the *TimeWatch* documentary on Aberfan provides a striking exception to this. Diversity of witnesses, in terms of ethnicity, social class, or even identifiable regional origin, is extremely limited across the documentaries, restricting opportunities for cultural negotiation over the complexity and unevenness of social change within the decade.

Some counter-hegemonic aspects of television's presentation of witness memories are, however, evident. Despite the euphoric connotations of music festival footage, there is little sense of the nostalgia that popular music has inscribed indelibly on prosthetic memories of the decade. The fate of unmarried mothers in an era of alleged sexual liberation (especially outside the affluent areas of metropolitan life) is not the only source of pain to be documented. Even amongst those who participated enthusiastically in the hedonism of the times, occasional voices express reservations about its consequences. Peter Finn, who articulated such rejoicing over the extinction of possessive attitudes, reflects at the end of 'Virgins' that, although the sexual revolution brought him a few years of happiness, 'it didn't bring

me freedom'. The absence of nostalgia in the documentaries that focus on protest takes a different form. Here, the tendency to bracket the past from the present, revealing nothing of the processes that tamed youthful enthusiasm for structural change, precludes any yearning for a revolution that never materialized.

Documentary's stress on pace, visual interest and narrative structure constrains the space for memory work that might throw up Benjamin's 'moments of danger'. Remembering has its own unfolding pace, but television, unlike film, still adheres to the staccato-style imperative of the viewer's glance. In the rapid sequencing of segmented memory sound-bites and archive glimpses, accompanied by fragments of diegetic or non-diegetic sixties sounds, the kaleidoscope of images distracts us from the involvement in the process of remembering that typifies Lanzmann's technique in film. Lanzmann's slowly moving camera forces us to linger, often painfully, over landscapes haunted by associations with the Holocaust and to attend to elongated interviews that continue even against the evident resistance of the speaker. Television too often finds ways to integrate, and subdue, the performance of witnesses' memories within its own narrative and visual requirements. Commentary and archive footage, with their directing or generalizing capacities, tend to smooth away the rough edges of potential moments of disruption or tension in memory evocation. Those forms of archive film consonant with the mythology of a decade of political rebellion and sexual revolution have a particularly hegemonic capacity. Witnesses' memories punctuate rather than interrogate these, inflecting them as either firmly set in a past era or as requiring the modest qualification of recognising the undercurrent of pain, especially for women. Extracts from 1960s programming, on the other hand, by providing their own invocation of the predominant social mores and values of the time, can, with skilful editing, add resonance to the remembering process and accentuate its interrogation of sixties' mythology.

The reminiscences of witnesses become most alive and persuasive when they are grounded in specific detail. By including snatches of reproduced conversation, struggling for appropriate metaphors or analogies to communicate their feelings, and producing their own graphic 'epiphanies' of the era, witnesses come closest to the conditions of performing memory work. Memories that exhibit poetic qualities potentially work against the televisual grain of linearity and flow.<sup>40</sup> Memory does not necessarily take 'pictorial' form and the referencing of other forms of sensual experience (although, surprisingly, not sound, despite the prominence of popular lyrics in most people's recollections of the sixties) surfaces in several accounts.<sup>41</sup> However, in its love of 'serial monoglossia', its denying of opportunities for collective remembering and its pretence that visualization of the past resides primarily in archives, not in people's memories, television documentary focuses too exclusively on the often truncated outcome of memory rather than memory as process. By reifying memory into a means of presenting

<sup>40</sup> Kuhn, 'A journey through memory', p. 190, comments that memory texts 'have more in common with poetry than with classical narrative'.

<sup>41</sup> The role of music and sound, for example, has been discussed by Philip Drake, 'Mortgaged to music': new retro movies in 1990s Hollywood cinema', in Grainge (ed.), *Memory and Popular Film*, pp. 183–201. Recognized also by Annette Kuhn, 'A journey through memory', p. 186.

‘colour’ or ‘instantiation’, television misses opportunities for a performance of a diversity of memories that might unsettle comfortable views of the past and suggest a radical enquiry into how the present and future might be otherwise. Attending to witnesses’ own ideas about how they might wish to stage their testimonies would also offer fresh possibilities for creative and courageous television, capable of responding to the graphic and imaginative possibilities of memory work.

# Virtualizing the Real: sequelization and secondary memory in Steven Spielberg's *Artificial Intelligence: A. I.*

CAROLYN JESS-COOKE

Steven Spielberg's *Artificial Intelligence: A. I.* (2001) portrays the creation of a robotic or 'mecha' child as a living, thinking, dreaming replica of a dead human boy named David. The mecha David is not unique, but is part of a series of identical dolls which are packaged and sold off to childless families. The David dolls are created to genuinely love their 'parents', love being 'the key by which they acquire a kind of subconscious'. However, as demonstrated by the robotic David (Haley Joel Osment) on which the film focuses, the mecha subconscious is shown to be a superimposition of the subconscious of the dead boy after whom the robots are patterned, a subconscious that is dictated to by the subjectivity of its creator, and the robot's own artificial intelligence, which essentially reprograms desire through old memories. *A. I.* subsequently engages with much of the symbolic rhetoric of the unconscious by exploring 'otherness' and subjectification, each in the context of 'post-ness', as David struggles to define himself as a 'real' boy after the manner of his human predecessor with his own unique identity and subjectivity. As I go on to argue, David's 'real-ness' is defined in the film in terms of his psychological development, which moves not towards human 'real-ness' as in the story of Pinocchio, but towards the psychoanalytic 'Real' as described by Jacques Lacan.

*A. I.* persistently invokes a number of psychic discourses and responses, showing David's 'mother' at one point on the toilet reading

- 1 Sigmund Freud, 'Excerpts from Freud's letters to Fliess', in Elisabeth Young-Breuhl (ed.), *Freud on Women: a Reader* (London: Hogarth, 1992), p.55.

*Freud on Women*. The scene itself is reminiscent of Freud's famous admission of a childhood memory (recounted in *Freud On Women*) of his searching for his mother in a wardrobe and crying until he found her.<sup>1</sup> In Spielberg's scene, David opens the bathroom door on his mother and, smiling, says 'I found you'. In line with the way in which Freudian discourses are deployed to allude to *A. I.*'s cultural and aesthetic engagements, Spielberg's previous flirtations with Oedipal complexes (*The Sugarland Express* [1974], *E. T.* [1982], *Empire of the Sun* [1987] and *Hook* [1991]) are noticeably developed in this film into full-blown speculations on the construction of the subconscious and portraits of maternity as a point of origin in an age where the 'original' is purportedly nowhere to be found. As I will demonstrate, the tension between the 'original' and its derivative, or the sequel, informs the film's portrait of virtual subjectivity. Perhaps more pointed, however, is the film's construction of reflective surfaces and the circle as symbols of David's psychological development. I go on to discuss the film's representations of the subconscious and subjectivity in terms of the Freudian and Lacanian theories it appears to invoke.

Used by film theorists in the 1970s to theorize the spectatorial pleasures of the cinema, Lacan's notion of the gaze, at least in his early work, defined the process of a subject viewing itself in a mirror as a unified conscious self. Regarded as the first act of identification, this act of mirror gazing is essentially a *mis*-identification because the 'self' is perceived as an image, a fantasy, an 'ideal ego'. In short, the subject is mediated and constructed through the object. Lacan's definition of 'the mirror stage' is closely associated with the Imaginary, a primary stage of psychological development defined by the infant's blissful unity with its mother. Lacan determines the Imaginary as a persistent psychological undercurrent by which the ego is constructed, and through which individuals develop and perpetuate a sense of 'self' by identifying with external images. Following this stage is the Symbolic, adumbrated by the acquisition of language, the experience of loss and separation from the mother and the entrance into what Lacan calls 'the Law of the Father'.<sup>2</sup> These stages proved fruitful for film theorists seeking to define the process of identification inherent in spectatorship. Drawing parallels between the cinema theatre and the maternal womb, Christian Metz suggested that the cinematic apparatus constructs for the spectator a re-enactment of the Imaginary, while Jean-Louis Baudry emphasized the urgency for a consideration of the Symbolic in terms of the spectator's 'lack' that is perpetuated by the cinematic experience. By and large, the connections drawn between film spectatorship and psychoanalysis ignored Lacan's third psychic process, the Real, possibly because of its somewhat underdeveloped conceptualizations and elusive, complex conceits. At this point, it is enough to say that the Real can be read as a psychic remainder of the Imaginary and the Symbolic by which desire is continually repeated and re-experienced. Although the Real does *not* refer to reality, it can be understood as the process by which we create

- 2 Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience', in *Écrits: a Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2001), pp.1–7.

reality. With this in mind, the following essay regards the concept of the Real as a vital tool by which contemporary modes of spectatorship, memory and virtual subjectivity can be accessed.

*A. I.* has two parallel narrative strands of equal import: a father who creates multiple robotic simulacra of his dead son, David, and a mother who ‘adopts’ a robotic simulacrum of David to fulfil her desire to continue be a mother in the event of losing her own son. In both cases, the grief of losing a child propels a parent towards substituting, or replacing, their lost human ‘original’ with a mecha ‘sequel’. Suffice to say that the mecha project is deeply flawed, not least by the rootedness of its design in post-traumatic repetition, but also by the effects of desire, which lead David to kill another robot child. Professor Hobby (William Hurt) creates David to love his ‘adoptive’ parents, but David only loves his Mommy, and that love is, as Hobby states, ‘fuelled by desire’. In turn, David’s creation is fuelled by Professor Hobby’s desire to reincarnate his son. Desire is thus conceived of in the film as circular and repetitive, as it is never satisfied. The ramifications of David’s design as a machine are that he will *always* be a child, will always be full of desire, meaning that he cannot mature and can never acquire a sense of self: unless he becomes human. It is this dilemma – David as a being of pure desire and his circular journey to become, or recover, the Real – that registers much of the desire to remember, recreate and recover in twenty-first century culture.

The film’s presentation of a robotic sequel invokes the notion of the film sequel as an act of re-viewing, or a re-living of a previous spectatorial experience. A major thrust of the following analysis is therefore towards sequelization as a process that draws upon and extrapolates the ‘return’ of the Real. Although Lacan’s remarks on the Real are sparse and altogether slippery, his suggestions of this as ‘the return, the coming back’ prompt further examination of the relevancy and development of this notion in contemporary cinema, and have been elaborated at length by Todd McGowan, Elizabeth Cowie, Hal Foster *et al* to indicate a process of psychic return, a state of pure, regressive, subconscious desire or *jouissance*.<sup>3</sup> Slovenian Lacanian Slavoj Žižek has conducted an inexhaustive interrogation of the Real throughout his works, positing it on the one hand as the underbelly of reality, and on the other as the ‘kernel’ of trauma that cannot be represented. For me, the Real is implicitly concerned with the repetition of repressed experience that cannot be symbolized. The reason it cannot be symbolized, moreover, is because all signifiers and symbols lead only to the representation of desire, and not to the object of desire. Lacan’s description of the Real as the process by which ‘we see ourselves governed by the pleasure principle’ motivates my discussion of the Real as comprehensible through the conceptual registers of sequelization. As one example, ‘the compulsion to repeat’ – the keystone of the pleasure principle – is evident in the deluge of film sequels in recent years.<sup>4</sup> The pleasure principle’s involvement of *jouissance* that is beyond language

3 Todd McGowan, ‘Looking for the gaze: Lacanian film theory and its vicissitudes’, *Cinema Journal*, vol. 42, no.3 (2003), pp. 27–47.

Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: the Avant-garde as the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996). Elizabeth Cowie, *Representing the Woman: Cinema and Psychoanalysis* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996). Patrick Fuery, *New Developments in Film Theory* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 6–20.

4 Sigmund Freud, ‘Beyond the pleasure principle’, in James Strachey (trans. and ed.), *The Standard Editions of the Complete Psychological Works*, vol. 24 (London: Hogarth Press, 1995), pp.19–30.

and therefore caught up with attempts to represent the unrepresentable – an impossible feat, according to Lacan – seems to me to inform sequelization, insofar as the sequel intrudes upon our memories of the ‘original’ to rerepresent, perpetuate and rupture that ‘unrepresentable’ and entirely subjective encounter.

The commonality of sequelization is demonstrated by the resurgence of box office sequels in the twenty-first century since the rise of the sequel in the 1970s, most noticeably after the success of Spielberg’s *Jaws* in 1975. While I consider the phenomenon of sequelization in the light of *A. I.*’s reproduction of androids (the mecha), I am more interested in its ideological implications, in particular the characteristics of the sequel (deriving from the Latin *sequi*, ‘to follow’) as a trope of repetition, continuity, memory, secondariness, post-ness and desire. Sequelization in *A. I.* is played out within a context of a post-global warming, post-apocalyptic America, wherein ‘legal sanctions’ restrict pregnancies to stabilize international economies, resulting in the creation of mecha (that do not sleep, eat or deplete natural resources) as servants, workers, lovers and substitute offspring for childless parents. Mecha are thus defined by their ‘sequel-ness’ as mechanical continuations of mortal predecessors in the same moment as their very existence embodies the sense of post-ness with which this futuristic world is infused. For instance, David is the ‘sequel’ to Professor Hobby’s dead son as he is essentially the consequence, or incarnation, of an intense grief following the death of Hobby’s son. Thus while David is created in the like-ness of the dead boy, he possesses an entirely different subjectivity. The trope of the sequel therefore offers a compelling, if not problematic, reorganization of psychic processes, particularly in terms of its insistence upon the ‘return’ and compulsion to repeat that underlines the Lacanian Real.

It is precisely the composition of memories by an entity that is a *living* memory that underscores *A. I.*’s treatment of subjectivity and sequelization. The chief connection between sequelization and the Real lies in their inherent investments in memory as a remainder of a moment in the past. In terms of the Real, the remainder is the moment in which the infant is faced with its otherness in the mirror. Sequelization plays in this field of memory by creating a veritable superimposition of reconstructed memorializations and subjectivities within the framework of representation. Indeed, just as the sequel is a composite of old and new, or Self and Other, mecha are portrayed in the film as ‘bricolage’ – assemblages of old and new technologies, styles and identities. The film juxtaposes concepts of mimesis, repetition, and sequelization to posit the threat of artificiality – as demonstrated by the Flesh Fair – premised on difference, not sameness. In other words, the dread of ‘uncanny’ simulacra lies in the muddy space between the ‘real’ and its copy, the site that is ‘between two deaths’.<sup>5</sup>

It is my intention, first, to consider the inherent modes of desire in sequelization, the desire to remember, the desire to repeat, the desire to recreate and the desire to return, in the light of the film’s meditation on

5 Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: an Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. 23.



these concepts in the context of *mechanized* psychological growth. The ‘regressive desire’ that pervades both the Real and sequelization and which is the emotional subtext of Spielberg’s film, prompts my interrogation of the Real as based solely on *jouissance*: having encountered the ‘lack’ of the Symbolic, might not the urge of the unconscious towards a primal return be complicit with post-traumatic scenarios, as the film suggests? How can a human-made mechanical subconscious ever transgress the infiltrations of subjectivity to subscribe to the ‘truth’ of the Real, and what implications does this have for readings of cinema as an apparatus of the unconscious? How far does the sequel deconstruct the process of subjectivity in the act of remembering, and to what end? In order to answer these queries, I go on to consider *A. I.* as a means by which a fuller understanding of both sequelization and the Real can be achieved.

Based on a short story, *Super-Toys Last All Summer Long*, by British novelist Brian Aldiss, *A. I.* has a considerable preproduction history that involves a series of exchanges between Stanley Kubrick and Spielberg. In awe of and influenced by Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), Spielberg wrote and directed *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in 1977. Inspired by Spielberg’s *E. T.: Extra Terrestrial* (1982), Kubrick purchased the rights to Aldiss’s science fiction novel in 1983. Extensive planning ensued for the film’s production, including 1000 sketches and an attempt to build a robotic child in the same way that Spielberg had created a robotic ‘alien’ for *E. T.* Kubrick’s brother-in-law, Jan Harlan (also his documentarian and executive producer), oversaw the seven-year correspondence between Kubrick and Spielberg, and insisted that Spielberg helm *A. I.* (for which Harlan is credited as executive producer) when Kubrick died in 1999. The result is a conflation of Spielberg’s aesthetic fascination with childhood – demonstrated by a body of almost ninety productions which predominantly recreate the childhood experience, and by the DreamWorks SKG logo, which features a child sitting in the curve of a crescent moon – and Kubrick’s interest in human essence and evolution alongside the emergence of the machine. Although critical reception of the film upon its release was generally negative (mostly for its awkward juxtaposition of Kubrick’s typically futuristic cynicism with another dose of Spielberg’s family portraits), the film’s currency as a cultural and aesthetic commentary is beginning to be recognized.

Spielberg’s interest in families and childhood as founded in his own painful memories has been well documented. In Spielberg’s own words,

I use my childhood in all my pictures, and all the time. I go back there to find ideas and stories. My childhood was the most fruitful part of my entire life. All those horrible, traumatic years I spent as a kid became what I do for a living today, or what I draw from creatively today.<sup>6</sup>

Spielberg’s twentieth-century works index his childhood experience through a variety of portraits of imagination and escape, yet *A. I.* is

6 Quoted in Andrew Yule, *Steven Spielberg: Father of the Man* (London: Little, Brown, 1996), p. i.

7 Christian Metz, 'The imaginary signifier', in Philip Rosen (ed.) *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: a Film Theory Reader* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986) p. 253.

8 See Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation Website; <http://www.vhf.org> (accessed 1 June 2005).

9 Lacan, 'The mirror stage', p. 5.

resolutely self-conscious of 'the mirror of childhood' that is registered in his earlier films.<sup>7</sup> In many ways, the film functions as a post-traumatic iteration – in much the same way as David performs as an incarnation of post-trauma – and reifies its awareness of that process by imagining David's psychic development as complicit with sequelization. The film's investments in memory and forgetting also signal much of Spielberg's concerns with preserving eye-witness accounts of traumatic pasts, made evident by his creation of the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History (SSVH) Foundation in 1994, which was established so 'that history will not be forgotten'.<sup>8</sup> Housing over 45,000 survivor testimonies, the SSVH Foundation emphasizes first-hand accounts of a traumatic past as a means by which that past will not be forgotten, and as a means by which the event can be prevented from being displaced or distanced by secondary memory. While the Foundation's archives are extremely beneficial in accessing a major point in history and culture, its existence points to the problems of representing trauma and creating an objective history. These problems are most apparent in *A. I.*, especially in relation to the construction of a virtual subjectivity and in representing the past.

Spielberg explores the possibilities of a virtual psychological process first and foremost by interrogating conceptions of virtual memory. The film charts David's development from Imaginary to Symbolic to Real through cinematographic and metonymic circularity, and a host of reflective surfaces that suggest the 'mirror stage' of David's development. As suggested earlier, the mirror stage is the point at which a child sees itself in the mirror but does not yet understand that the reflection is a reflection, nor does it comprehend the difference between Self and Other. The film's mise-en-scene is constructed entirely with this notion in mind. Having been adopted by Monica (Frances O'Connor) and Henry Swinton (Sam Robards) as a 'replacement' for their comatose son, Martin (Jake Thomas), David's first morning at the Swinton residence is spent watching Monica prepare breakfast, peering from below the stainless steel surface area that reflects – and doubles – his eyes. David's subjectivity at this stage is bound up with Monica. As David never looks at his own image in the mirror, Monica serves as his reflection, his subjectivity. Following a series of similar reflections there is the appearance of the circle at David's first meal with Monica and Henry. An overhead shot of David as he sits directly beneath the circular lighting unit symbolizes the 'wholeness' of the Imaginary and the unity that David believes to exist between him and his 'Mommy'. As Lacan indicates, the purpose of the mirror stage is 'to break out of the circle of the *Innenwelt* (inner world) into the *Umwelt* (outer world)', effectively shattering the 'mirror of childhood' in which the Self is unknown.<sup>9</sup> David's complicity at the beginning of the film with the 'circle' of the mirror phase, or *Innenwelt*, is used not only to suggest that he is at the stage of 'infantile' development, but also to indicate the complicity of the mecha Self with a throng of replicated Others. In the arena of artificiality, the Self is a perpetual sequel to Other-ness.

Yet the film deliberately constructs David as virtually developing throughout the three stages of the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real in order to highlight his becoming, by the end, a 'Real' boy, or a boy that permits access to and embodies the Real. David is not born to love his Mommy, but recognizes her potential and becomes programmed to love her when she decides to 'hardwire his affections' using Hobby's prescribed imprinting procedure. The scene immediately preceding David's imprinting shows him tucked up in a cocoon-like bed, with a series of hooped strip-lights encircling him from above and below. A circular window above David's head frames an exaggerated virtual crescent moon – unabashedly the DreamWorks logo – which foreshadows the fractured unity that accompanies his entrance into the Symbolic. In this scene Monica watches David in bed, visibly deciding to adopt him for good. This decision is implicitly premised on David's reincarnation of Monica's memories of her son Martin, as David effectively takes his place, occupying Martin's bed, clothes and space with a boy-ish presence. The crescent moon above Monica in this scene appears to be conjured by her decision, although it appears throughout subsequent shots to foreshadow the separation and not the unison, that she puts into effect by programming David's love. For it is the moment of David's love, his obsessive urgency to win Monica's affections, that simultaneously prompts her rejection of him. Thus when Martin recovers from his coma, a palpable rivalry emerges between the boys that changes David's love for Monica to obsessive desire. When Martin cunningly advises David that Monica *will* love him if David creeps into her bedroom in the middle of the night with a pair of scissors to cut off a lock of her hair, David acquiesces, but in doing so, he accidentally cuts Monica's eye and thus appears to be dangerous, forcing the Swintons to get rid of him.

Taking a few steps backward, however, it is possible to identify the film's suggestion of David's entrance into the Symbolic after the 'mirror phase' by Monica's imprinting, using the words 'cirrus, Socrates, particle, decibel, hurricane, dolphin, tulip, Monica, David, Monica'. The Symbolic 'implies a fixing of the subject' by figuring 'the intervention of the father as [a] third term in the dyadic, imaginary relation of mother and child', which in turn creates 'a rupture' in the psyche of the subject.<sup>10</sup> The 'secondariness' of the Symbolic additionally points to the Self as a creation founded in post-ness. The Symbolic is also governed by the acquisition of language. Most appositely, then, the word 'Mommy' enters and dominates David's vocabulary upon his imprinting, although Henry remains 'Henry', and David's relationship with him becomes strained. From this point on, moreover, the 'wholeness' of the Imaginary is fractured, and David's reflected image is shattered. David has entered the 'law of the Father' and now that he realizes that his Mommy will die and has others to care for and love, his desire for his lost union with her is fortified. As David's object of desire, Monica is figured at this point in concert with the circle. David – his head on Monica's lap, eyes

<sup>10</sup> Cowie, *Representing the Woman*, p. 98.

pleading – asks his Mommy how long she will live. Here a medium closeup shot captures Monica's reflection in a circular mirror, emphasizing her objectivity as a result of David's newly imprinted subjectivity. The circle, then, is additionally the articulation of the 'O' of the 'Other', represented by Monica.

What has occurred at the moment of Monica's imprinting is that David's unconscious has been activated. As Freud argues, the unconscious contains 'impressions' which, forged during childhood, are undiminished by adulthood.<sup>11</sup> Freud's description of the Mystic Writing-Pad as a psychic instrument of memory inscription renders the psychological process of remembering as comparable to a slab whose three surfaces record permanent inscriptions at the same time as 'erasing' undesirable inscriptions.<sup>12</sup> Comparing the two upper slabs of the pad to consciousness and the wax slab to the unconscious, Freud proposes memory as both a *tabula rasa* and as a narrative penned by the author-subject. When pressed by Martin to recall his first memory, David remembers 'a bird with big wings' that is ultimately revealed to be a statue outside Professor Hobby's Cybertronics' factory building. The first 'slab' of David's memory, then, is 'penned' by his creator, and the series of words with which Monica programmes him create another layer. From this point on, all of David's conscious activity is geared towards becoming a 'real', or human, boy. The play on 'real' throughout the film, however, implies his development as a *Real* boy, bound by the implications of this process to return to the Imaginary. From the moment of David's decision to become 'real', his unconscious becomes saturated with a desire to return to the womb. Because he is built, not born, David's unrecognized, unconscious goal is explicitly to return to the site of his origins, the site of the 'bird with big wings': the Cybertronics factory.

The film indicates the memory process as a superimposition of Real (the real event) and Imaginary (the subjective interpretation). Put differently, David's desire for Monica is conflated with his unconscious desire to return to the Cybertronics factory. Furthermore, the conflation of subjectivities that have created his unconscious, or the means by which he creates his own reality, means that, to a degree, David is his *own* object of desire, which contributes enormously to the circularity of desire. This dichotomy is explored in early psychoanalytic readings of spectatorship. Reading the 'persistence of the exclusive relation to the mother, desire as a pure effect of lack and endless pursuit, the initial core of the unconscious' of the Imaginary as indicative of the spectatorial experience, Metz determines the Imaginary as 'undoubtedly reactivated by the play of that *other mirror*, the cinema screen, in this respect a veritable psychical substitute' (his emphasis).<sup>13</sup> In other words, the cinema as 'other' becomes a substitute, or surrogate, for the irrevocable Imaginary. Yet both Baudry's observations and Metz's comments are based on a consideration of suture, or a system of shot/reverse shot, that occurs between spectator-subject and film-object. As Kaja Silverman suggests of the shot/reverse shot process,

11 Sigmund Freud, 'A note on the mystic writing-pad', in Strachey (trans. and ed.), *The Standard Editions*, vol.19, p. 213.

12 Ibid., p. 227.

13 Metz, 'The imaginary signifier', p. 250.

14 Kaja Silverman, 'Suture', in Rosen (ed.), *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, p. 219.

15 Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Norton, 1981), p. 282.

the viewer of the cinematic spectacle experiences shot 1 as an imaginary plenitude, unbounded by any gaze, and unmarked by difference. Shot 1 is thus the site of a *jouissance* akin to that of the mirror stage prior to the child's discovery of its separation from the ideal image which it has discovered in the reflecting glass.<sup>14</sup>

By figuring David as both the 'eye-subject' and object within the 'reflecting glass', the film posits the Real as an impossible destination specifically because, at this stage, subjectivity and objectivity are inseparable. David as both 'eye-subject' and mirror is further denoted by a shot during the scene in which Monica abandons David. Driving to a woodland area, Monica tells David she has to leave him with Teddy, the super-toy Martin gave to David. As Monica drives off, David's reflection is captured by the circular wing-mirror as the car pulls away, making him appear progressively smaller. The reflection, carried off into the distance, reinforces Monica as David's reflection, his narcissistic 'Other'. In this connection, the circular wing mirror frames David as *l'objet petit a*, the little other or 'o', the signifying mark of the desire-drive.<sup>15</sup> David is thus cinematographically imagined as the film's circularity, the signifier of desire, the embodiment of the 'return' underlying the sequel.

In addition to desire and 'return', notions of 'secondariness' and inferiority are complicit with sequelization. In effect, David is rejected because he is neither Monica and David's 'real' son, nor is he a 'real' boy. The machine/human or mecha/Orga axis throughout the film contributes to the sequel's inherent disappointment, otherness and latent artificiality. The film's reference to an earlier text (unmentioned in Aldiss's short story), Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio*, connects David to his textual counterpart in the context of the sequel. At Martin's (scheming) request, Monica reads *Pinocchio* to the two boys. In Collodi's novel the puppet Pinocchio aims to become 'real' in the sense that he desires to be an authentic, original and human. Martin makes the parallels between David and Pinocchio obvious to David in order to undermine his 'eligibility' for Monica's love. Thus the message David receives from this story is that love is coterminous with real-ness. As Martin has woken from his coma and returned home, David has been swiftly relegated from his position as substitute son to Martin's toy. In an earlier scene, Martin asks what 'super-toy stuff' David can do – if, for instance, he can walk on the walls or ceiling. David says that he cannot, and asks Martin if he can. 'No', Martin responds, 'because *I'm real*'. It is therefore clear, that despite the general advantage of super-toys over humans in many ways – such as intelligence, agility and manual dexterity – the emphasis here is on real-ness. 'Real', or human, is 'original', and is therefore unquestionably unique and superior.

Yet the division between reality and irreality is so muddled in the film that the notion of 'originality' is shown to be slowly dying. The film supports this observation by its inclusion of a 'Flesh Fair' at which

humans gather at an arena – much like a gladiatorial Colosseum – to watch mecha being ritualistically destroyed. Humans, or ‘orga’ as they are named in reaction to ‘mecha’, are of course ‘original’, but to validate that originality, mecha must be consistently undermined. ‘We are alive’, the hostess reminds the crowd, ‘and this is a celebration of life’. Mecha are melted with boiling oil, shot from a cannon into rotating blades, and ripped limb from limb. In actuality, the Flesh Fair is not a celebration of life, but the demonstration of fears connected to the potential ‘real-ness’ of mecha. Because of their ‘real-ness’, or accurate representation of human appearance, mecha appear to pose a threat. To orga, mecha signify death, or the death of originality, and thus the death of humanity.

David’s human appearance confuses a number of orga, and ultimately saves his skin. The host speaker, Lord Johnson-Johnson (Brendan Gleeson), drags David to the centre of the stadium, ready to be burned to death. David cries ‘Don’t burn me! I’m David!’, echoing the cry of the wood in Collodi’s novel that later ‘becomes’ Pinocchio:

[Master Cherry] grasped the hatchet quickly to peel off the bark and shape the wood. But as he was about to give it the first blow, he stood still with arm uplifted, for he had heard a wee, little voice say in a beseeching tone: ‘Please be careful! Do not hit me so hard!’<sup>16</sup>

16 Carlo Collodi, *Pinocchio*, trans. E. Harden (London: Puffin, 1996), p. 3.

Collodi’s narrative continues to report how Master Cherry gives the piece of wood to his childless friend, Geppetto, who makes himself a marionette named Pinocchio that will dance, fence and turn somersaults. Although named after Professor Hobby’s son, David is also named after Michelangelo’s marble statue ‘David’, which was (like Pinocchio) sculpted from an odd-shaped material (marble) that had previously been rejected by other artists. Michelangelo’s ‘David’, the mecha David and indeed Pinocchio are all characterized by rejection. In addition, David and Pinocchio share a desire for originality. David goes so far as to disengage himself from his textual counterpart, crying ‘I’m not Pinocchio! Don’t let me die! I’m David!’ as though the fact of his *difference* and (false) individuality is a requisite for life.

David’s desire to be ‘one of a kind’ is founded, of course, on his desire to be loved by Monica. When Gigolo Joe (Jude Law) tells David that orga (humans) hate mecha, David retorts, ‘my mommy doesn’t hate me! Because I’m special! And unique! Because there’s never been anyone like me before, ever!’ David, at this point, is the sequel that articulates what other sequels point to in recent years: that despite their derivative condition, they aspire to and claim ‘originality’ because of particularly charismatic and distinctive traits. For example, one of the innumerable ‘cognitive simulacra’ in *I, Robot* (Alex Proyas, 2004) insists that he is unique, and that the other robots ‘look like me but none of them are me’. In *The Matrix* trilogy (The Wachowski Bros., 1999, 2003), Neo (an obvious anagram) is ‘the one’, despite having six Messiah-like ‘predecessors’, while his antithetical ‘double’, Agent Smith (Hugo Weaving), has endless ‘copies’ of himself, or ‘me *two*’. The obsession

17 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994).

18 Foster, *The Return of the Real*, p.132. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p. 50.

19 Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 4.

with 'one of a kind' registers the sequel as a symptom of *difference*. As Gilles Deleuze points out, however, difference is ineluctably correspondent with repetition, suggesting the sequel as difference reified only by dialogue with its predecessors.<sup>17</sup> Like the Imaginary, which fuses absence and presence, the sequel is ultimately bound up with difference as a dialogue between history and memory.

In this connection, the notion of the sequel organizes the film's presentation of historical repetition. The racist and fascist sentiments of the Flesh Fair are figured as a continuation of Nazi regimes, whilst the graphic destruction of mecha is imagined as another Holocaust. 'History', as one of the mecha asserts, 'repeats itself'. The trauma of the twentieth century Holocaust is shown to be repeated, but as a sequel, a continuation. It is precisely the film's treatment of historical repetition that sets the sequel apart from repetition and, in so doing, underscores the Real as repetition. As Hal Foster suggests, 'as missed, the real cannot be represented; it can only be repeated, indeed it *must* be repeated'. He goes on to say that 'repetition is not reproduction', but instead 'serves to *screen* the real understood as traumatic'. However, 'this very need also *points* to the real, and at this point the real *ruptures* the screen of repetition' (his emphasis).<sup>18</sup> David is not a simple mecha repetition; he 'screens' the traumatic traces of his own circumstances of reproduction. The dialogues between cultural consciousness, historical repetition and psychic *jouissance* in *A. I.* can be read, therefore, as iterations of a cultural anxiety borne of past traumas, which are notably played out in the shape of what I call 'prevention-compulsion' in Spielberg's subsequent production, *Minority Report* (2002). The dilemma of the sequel, or the arena of 'post-ness', is indeed the 'impossibility' of the Real, as the urge not only to remember but also to externalize or incarnate the process of memory – the subconscious – leads in the film to a series of problematic representations, for example, the creation of innumerable 'Davids' instead of a variety of 'unique' mecha children, which ultimately instils in David such a strong desire to be different that he resorts to murder to defend his subjectivity and 'real-ness'. In western society, similar problems are apparent in terms of what Andreas Huyssen calls 'a hypertrophy of memory', creating an overabundance of past-ness and, as evidenced by architecture, art (and film, I would argue), a dichotomy of palimpsest and lacunae.<sup>19</sup> In *A. I.*, the fear of forgetting is so great that images of the past, images of the *dead*, create an uncanny sense of ever-present absence. Evocations of the future of western society as we know it thus appear in the film in the context of the struggle between originality and representation, to comprehend the effects of 'post'-ness, or the virtualizing of the Real.

As the sequel reifies, the Real is forever displaced from historical repetition, and is wholly distinct from secondary memory. Dominick LaCapra uses the term 'secondary memory' to discuss representations of second-hand experience, or what Huyssen explains as a symptom of 'second generation' Holocaust survivors who are compelled to



20 Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), pp. 20–21. Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, p. 135.

21 Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: a Feminist Introduction* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin Australia, 1990), p. 34.

22 Quoted in Anika Lemaire, *Jacques Lacan*, trans. David Macey (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 116.

23 Huyssen, *Present Pasts*, p. 136.

represent their experiences of their parents' Holocaust memories and post-traumatic symptoms.<sup>20</sup> 'Secondary memory' is also a technological term, used to denote a computer's long-term memory system. Composed of a three-tiered system of cache (immediate memory), primary memory (main 'functional' memory) and secondary memory, computer memory is a technological configuration of the three-tiered psychic system of Freud's Mystic Writing pad. David is an expression of both kinds of memory: his virtual subconscious has its origins in computer memory, yet the emotional subtext of his existence is 'second generation' expression. In many ways, David is an attempt to reconnect with the Real, which is perceivably the major dynamic of 'second generation' representations: to reveal the Real behind the mask of memory. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it; 'The Real . . . is not the same as reality; [for] reality is lived and known through imaginary and symbolic representations'.<sup>21</sup> Yet in attempting to discover the Real, one must contend with the fact that no 'eye-witness' account of the past can ever reveal the Real in its entirety. Secondary representations thus reorganize second-hand memories 'in a certain manner [which] operates in a more satisfactory way, has a positive result, but still leaves out what one does not understand: the Real'.<sup>22</sup>

Spielberg's 'Real' is the Holocaust. Both *Schindler's List* (1993) and *War of the Worlds* (2005) evidence Spielberg's preoccupation with the Holocaust, and *A. I.* indicates a struggle in representing or comprehending the 'real' historical event. In fact, both *A. I.* and *Minority Report* can be read in terms of a self-consciousness of the problems posed by secondary memory, specifically the attempt to come to terms with an event that has shaped Spielberg's cultural identity and historical understanding, but only at the level of second-hand experience. The question posed by both films is how to represent a personal mode of experience within the Real's network of associated secondary memories, or, as Huyssen argues: 'How to represent that which one knows only through representations and from an ever-growing historical distance?'.<sup>23</sup> This dilemma is also apparent in *Minority Report*, which in some ways can be read as a 'sequel' to *A. I.* because of its engagement with secondary memory.

Like *A. I.*, *Minority Report* portrays the grief of a father, John Anderton (Tom Cruise), who has lost his son. Following the 'vision' of a psychic female Pre-Cognitive (Samantha Morton), John tracks down his son's killer in room number 1006 at a local hotel. Finding the room empty, he rotates the last digit on the door of the room to reveal that it is actually 1009. Turning to the door opposite, John finds the 'real' room 1006, as well as his suspect. One of Spielberg's early encounters with the Holocaust pointedly informs this scene. Relatives of the Spielberg family from Poland and the Ukraine had died during the Holocaust, and some survivors shared their experiences with the young Spielberg in ways that echo throughout this scene. As Andrew Yule describes the encounter: 'Only one aspect of the meeting remained vivid in his mind: one of the

group performed a magic trick with his concentration camp tattoo, the “6” twisted round to make a “9”.<sup>24</sup> The evocation of Spielberg’s second-hand experience of the Holocaust in this scene – or the portrait of a secondary memory in a scene that portrays the revision of a memory of the future – suggests that the Real is only ever ‘accessible’ as a symbolic interpretation, as a ‘sequel’ to the event forever complicit with the exigencies of subjectivity and the subconscious.

Nonetheless, the creation of mecha and the mecha ‘Holocaust’ portrayed in *A. I.* index representation politics as a necessary evil in the preservation of subjectivity, culture and originality. Indeed, the ‘primitive monsters that could play chess’ of the early modern period created by Voltaire, Jacques de Vaucanson *et al.* were not merely designed to duplicate the female ability to give birth or to function as technological sequels, but to recreate and return to the Imaginary by producing sequels in the image of the Mother: the site of all origins. In the twenty-first century, however, that return is informed by the Real as facilitated by the preservation of memory. The Real’s ‘impossible wholeness of self’ is threatened here by the bricolage-robots, while the ‘lack-of-being’ that comes on the heel of maternal unity is reflected by mecha who are neither alive nor dead.<sup>25</sup> Yet it is this very ‘in-between-ness’ of mecha – the fact that they will not die – which indicates their imbrication in memorialization. As Gigolo Joe predicts, ‘when the end comes, all that will be left is us’. Social amnesia is the death of memory, and the death of memory is the end of origins. In the event of impending apocalypse, the most important aspect of humanity in this film appears to be originality, in concert with a clarion call for remembrance.

The film’s constructions of the Imaginary point to the quest for originality as inseparable from the retrieval of the Mother-as-origin, and as inseparable from the Real. In keeping with this notion, the design of this society is overtly feminized and maternal. When David and Joe are eventually set free from the Flesh Fair, they make a course for Rouge City (a metropolized, post-postmodern sequel to the Moulin Rouge in Paris) in order to find the Blue Fairy. The bridges connecting the island of Rouge City to the mainland pass through the open mouths of large female heads, recalling Lacan’s comments on the ‘the abyss of the feminine organ *from which all life emerges*, the *gulf of the mouth*, in which everything is swallowed up, and no less the image of death in which everything comes to its end’ (my emphasis).<sup>26</sup> While the brain of the female mecha, Sheila (Sabrina Grdevich), in the film’s opening scene is accessed through her open mouth, the heart of (female) mecha society is found at the other end of the bridge in Rouge City. Buildings shaped as large phalluses were removed to maintain the film’s PG-13 rating, although edifices in various forms of the female body (and named ‘Mildred’) abound. This is ostensibly the home of the virtual ‘mother’, the place where, as Joe puts it, ‘the ones who made us are always looking for the ones who made them’. Essentially the desert of the Real, Rouge

25 Jacques Lacan, ‘The instance of the letter in the unconscious or reason since Freud’, in Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan (eds), *Literary Theory: an Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 190–205.

26 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954–55*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 164.

City features numerous representations of fetishized females and thus underscores the absence of the maternal figure, and is paved therefore with disunity, artificial 'sequels' and the 'lack' of Real-ness. The excessive presence of the virtual mother and the absence of the 'real' mother indicate at this point the displacement of originality by 'secondary' originality, which, although 'immortal', retains only a remembered trace of the Real, and never the Real itself.

David's condition and the world around him suggest the Real as a *resistance* against futurity, a regressive return that results not in the reconstruction of infantilism, but in mechanical reproduction, cryogeny and an apocalypse of reality. Frozen in time, David is the unconscious incarnate, a being entirely 'fuelled by desire', but infinitely unable to satisfy that desire. David may further be perceived as *innocence* incarnate, the articulated suspension of a pre-Oedipal era from which all adult desires originate. As Freud suggests, 'our childhood memories show us our earliest years not as they were but as they appeared at the later periods when the memories were aroused'.<sup>27</sup> Essentially composed of phantasies, these memories project adult desires upon infantile experiences. The urges of adulthood are interpreted by Freud as giving shape to unintelligible childhood encounters, yet it is further conceivable that infantile memories – suspended forever in the perpetual summer of the unconscious – are projected by an adult subject in the form of wishes and dreams. Charged with 'screen memories', the unconscious seeks 'to get itself represented by a subject who is still unaware of the fact that he is representing to himself the very scene of the unconscious where he is'.<sup>28</sup> Projected desires, as David signifies, are memories scripted upon the unconscious that are replayed throughout maturity by adult phantasies. In David's case, desire and memory are one. His 'love' is no more than the dichotomous repetition of repressed 'memories' (such as the 'bird with big wings', which is revealed to be synonymous with the Blue Fairy) that are configured as desires, and vice versa. Thus, David's journey to the Blue Fairy culminates in both an unconscious return to the place of his origins – underlined by Professor Hobby's admission, 'I guess that makes me your Blue Fairy' – and to the destination of his dream. The playing out of David's imprinted 'memories' suggests the sequel as the perpetuation of remembering, which is essentially rooted in the present tense. However, the modes of duplication in the world of *A. I.* have created a ruptured sense of presence, and as a consequence a 'superimposed' order of past-ness and futurity has replaced present-ness. The portrait of 'Manhattan' as 'the end of the world' suggests this most strongly, for the city is entirely submerged under water – 'full of weeping' – and appears to be drowning in its own reflection.

After encountering Dr Know in Rouge City, Joe, Teddy and David make their getaway in an amphibio-copter to Manhattan. Flying past the decaying flame of the Statue of Liberty (the only part of the statue that is not submerged), Manhattan's skyline appears as a dystopic relic flooded by tears, an oceanic terrain with echoes of Kevin Costner's *Waterworld*

27 Sigmund Freud, 'Screen memories', in Strachey (trans. and ed.), *The Standard Editions*, vol. 3, p. 322.

28 Jean Baudry, 'The apparatus: metapsychological approaches to the impression of reality in the cinema', in Rosen (ed.) *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology*, p. 317.

29 Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, p.116.

30 Sigmund Freud, 'The uncanny', in Strachey (trans. and ed.), *The Standard Editions*, vol. 17, p. 235.

(1995). David's destination features colossal statues of lions that 'weep' into the ocean below. This is the realm of the Imaginary, the desert of the Real flooded by recreations of and returns to the mirror phase, resulting in uncanny manifestations of narcissism (mecha), and an apocalyptic realization that the 'mother', or, more specifically, the maternal womb, cannot be recreated or re-entered. Landing inside the Cybertronics building, David finds a door inscribed with the refrain from W. B. Yeats' apocalyptic poem *The Stolen Child*. Therein David finds 'another who is me', another 'David', his identical simulacral twin.<sup>29</sup> David stares rigidly at his doppelgänger, yet the other 'David' does not flinch at his uncanny clone. Freud's notions of the uncanny or 'double' self as a 'harbinger of death' seem to be played out here, for David's immediate response is aggressive fear that there exists a rival for his mommy's affections.<sup>30</sup> 'You can't have her', David whispers, before swiping a steel lamp at his opponent's head and bashing his motherboard 'brains' in. An overhead shot captures David, still swinging at thin air, beneath a circular lighting structure similar to the one at the Swinton residence, but with a difference: this time the circle is not whole. It is composed of two crescents, not quite joining in the middle, signalling the *double* fracture of the Imaginary (emphasizing the meeting of the two Davids and the consequence of this encounter). The double 'C' further harks back to the clinic at the film's opening in which Martin was contained during his five-year coma. As Monica enters the clinic the camera pauses momentarily on the door sign that reads 'Cryogenics'. The 'C' in 'Cryogenics' resembles a crescent moon, and beside it another crescent, facing the opposite way, pre-empts the double crescent figured in the 'double Davids' scene. The moon denotes the perpetuation of childhood or the perpetuation of the *memory* of childhood, which is in turn suggested as the origin of all desire.

In the next room of the Cybertronics factory David finds rows of unprogrammed 'Davids' hanging along the walls. Finished Davids, as well as Darlenes, are packed in boxes that are headlined with the caption 'At Last A Love Of Your Own'. Echoing Ripley's horrifying discovery in *Alien: Resurrection* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1997), where she finds a series of botched attempts to 'revive' her genetically (including a grotesquely deformed twin, whom she kills), the mechanical sequels seriously undermine David's aspiration to be 'one of a kind'. 'You're the *first* of a kind', Professor Hobby offers, yet the simulacra articulate the original's irreplaceability and, in contrast, the utter insignificance of the sequel.

The mystery behind David's 'bird with big wings' memory is explained by an inchoate David-doll that faces a window behind which stands the bird-like Cybertronics effigy. Although David's Blue Fairy is yet to be found at this point, a shot capturing David as he presses his head inside the unfinished face of the doll configures *David* as the Blue Fairy, as blue lights behind the eye sockets of the doll light up David's eyes as he peers through towards the window. Moreover, the palimpsest created by David and his undeveloped twin stresses David

as both original and sequel, his own shot/reverse shot, a 'link' in a series of manufactured images. As foreshadowed by shots of David through pleated glass, the palimpsest quality of the David-doll shot ratifies David's residence in immortal youth, an existence wherein Joe's (final) comment 'I am ... I was' is not possible. David's condition is not founded on a perpetual Imaginary as was intended, but instead is the materialization of an infinite Real, a continually recycling apocalypse. This is because David is nothing more than someone else's memory; his own memories are palimpsests upon a text that has already been penned. In an earlier scene, the camera pans across a shrine of photographs of David and his father, culminating with a large photo of David (at the age that he is cloned) on Professor Hobby's desk with a plaque that reads 'In Loving Memory of David'. By creating a simulacrum that is essentially outside time and thus will not mature or die, Professor Hobby incarnates the memory of his son without recourse to mortality. David is programmed not only to love, but also never to *forget*.

Perhaps to indicate the triadic phases of psychological construction that are each initiated by and concomitant with the womb state, David is submerged underwater no less than three times throughout the film. The first time, David accidentally falls into the Swinton's outdoor pool, dragging Martin with him. When Martin is rescued, David is left on the pool floor, arms outstretched, abandoned before he is finally and *conclusively* abandoned by the Swinton family. The second occasion of submersion occurs after David's encounter with his double. Initially sitting many storeys above the ocean in Manhattan, David hurls himself into the sea in what appears to be a suicide attempt. Once under the water, he finds New York's theme park Coney Island replete with a *Pinocchio* set and – as luck would have it – a Blue Fairy statue. Once more, the presence of the circle dominates the scene in the form of a gigantic Ferris wheel beside the Blue Fairy that will eventually trap David underwater. At this point, however, David only catches a glimpse of the Blue Fairy before Joe swoops to his rescue. When Joe is ultimately plucked from the amphibio-copter by the police, David and Teddy begin their final descent towards the Blue Fairy. The narcissistic overtones at this point are obvious, reinforced by a slow superimposition of David's reflection and the image of the Blue Fairy statue on the amphibio-copter glass. However, when David gazes at the surface of the water (or, indeed, *any* reflective surface), the reflection he sees staring back at him is not his own face, but the Other, the object of his desire, hence (in part) David's reaction to his 'other' in Professor Hobby's study. The shattered glass in this earlier scene is congruent with the 'shattering' of the Imaginary, the first of a dyadic 'shattering' of the mirror phase that accompanies David's two-fold journey to his origins: to discover Professor Hobby, and to find the Blue Fairy, who emulates Walter Benjamin's comments on the 'Angel of History', whose face is turned to the past whilst being jettisoned in to the future.<sup>31</sup> Indeed the Blue Fairy shatters in a later scene and, after the apparent redawning of the Ice Age, the world of which David is the sole

31 Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the philosophy of history', in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992), p. 259.

‘living’ memory is in a state of splinter, a post-apocalyptic secondary Real.

When David and Teddy are rescued from their sunken ‘cage’ by robots, it is apparent that New York, and indeed the world, has been encased in ice. Pre-empting Roland Emmerich’s *The Day After Tomorrow* (2004), which imagines a futuristic New York that is flooded by the ocean before being caught in the (re)commencement of a post-millennial Ice Age, New York at this point evokes Rem Koolhaas’ description of ‘Manhattanism’ as ‘a factory of manmade experience, where the real and natural [have] ceased to exist’.<sup>32</sup> For as the robots inform David, mankind is no more; David is the sole ‘enduring memory’ of human beings. At this point architectural icons of New York (such as the Chrysler building) peer above ice dunes, reduced to shattered pieces that signify the deconstructed subjectivity that accompanies post-ness.

The film’s representation of New York as a shattered, post-traumatic space is retrospectively concomitant with post-9/11 discourse and, in this context, with the modes of ‘doubling’ and sequelization that have occurred throughout the film. Audiences in Australia, Germany and the UK viewed the film forty-eight hours after 9/11 (at its 13 September 2001 release). As I recall, the film seemed to capture the world’s emotional landscape at that moment, charged with uncertainty and, as Jean Baudrillard later commented, ‘symbolic significance’. In the context of 9/11, David’s destruction of his twin pertains to ‘the rhetoric of the mirror’, and to Baudrillard’s conviction that ‘only the doubling of the sign truly puts an end to what it designates’.<sup>33</sup> Focusing – perhaps rather coldly – on the facelessness and doubled identity of the twin towers, Baudrillard’s comments reflect the uncanny ramifications of the 9/11 tragedy. Gregory T. Esplin’s observations are worth repeating at length:

The uncanny is reflected even in the details of the World Trade Centre’s destruction: everything related to the incident seems [to] come in doubles. It occurred on the date in which the number one is repeated twice: 11. The United States President in ‘01 was George Bush. Not the first one, but the second: Bush II. . . . A feeling of eerie repetition also surrounds September 11, since this was the second time Islamic fundamentalists attacked the WTC, the first being the 1993 truck bombing of the North Tower which left six dead but failed to bring down the structure.<sup>34</sup>

A. I.’s engagement with the ‘double-ness’ of the World Trade Centre – and, inadvertently, with 9/11 – is reflected in the enduring presence of the twin towers amidst New York’s decaying structures. The towers function here to symbolically register the apocalypse of this world caused by the proliferation of uncanny representations or replicas of a lost original. At the end of the world, the Real is the existence of the double.

32 Rem Koolhaas, *Delirious New York: a Retroactive Manifesto for Manhattan* (Rotterdam: 010 Publishers, 1994), p. 10.

33 Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2002), pp. 41, 43, 44.

34 Gregory T. Esplin, ‘Double or nothing: the uncanny state of post-9/11 America’, *Philament: an Online Journal of the Arts and Culture*, vol. 6 (July 2005); [http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue6\\_pdf/ESPLIN\\_Double%20or%20Nothing.pdf](http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/publications/philament/issue6_pdf/ESPLIN_Double%20or%20Nothing.pdf) (accessed 1 June 2005).



35 James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-apocalypse* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p.26; Jacques Lacan, 'Seminar on "The Purloined Letter"', trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, in John P. Muller and William J. Richardson (eds), *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida & Psychoanalytic Reading*, (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1988), p. 52.

By the film's end, David has become the signifier of this lost original, or of the human race. To use James Berger's excellent term, David functions at this point as 'a traumatic-apocalyptic inscription' upon the cinematic palimpsest of New York, and, for audiences witnessing the film's pre-9/11 release in New York, serves as the 'letter' Lacan describes as arriving 'in reverse form'.<sup>35</sup> David is the memory of that trauma 'posted' from the future, *returning* to his destination in past-ness. The film's cinematography confirms this notion, for David's first appearance in the film is photographed in such a way as to liken him to the slender robots that rescue him in the future. As such, David is a memory sent to the past from a catastrophic state of post-ness in order to screen the moment of trauma. David's construction thus reifies the 'sequel' as a symbol of post-trauma, an attempt to get over the past, inscribing new identities, change and cultural progress on a culture weighted with memories of the Holocaust.

In this light, the Real appears coterminous with trauma and apocalypse. In Berger's words, 'apocalypse and trauma . . . both refer to shatterings of existing structures of *identity* and *language*, and both effect their own erasures from memory and must be reconstructed by means of their traces, remains, survivors, and ghosts: their symptoms' (my emphasis). The Real as an unrepresentable remainder correlates with this reading as the re-enactment of a subconscious past throughout perpetuity. It is in this manner that David achieves the wish he has harboured for two millennia. One of the robots that save David recounts a project devised to recreate mankind with samples of human DNA (like Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* [1993]), and informs David that they also attempted to retrieve a memory trace of human existence. As a result, they discovered that space-time stored information about every event that had ever occurred. The lock of hair that David successfully retrieved from Monica's head is still held in Teddy's pocket and, using this sample, the robots are able to achieve David's wish. That is, however, until Monica falls asleep, for the experiment conducted by the robots proved that 'resurrectees' stay alive only as long as they are conscious. David's return to his childhood is a potently psychic event, for the Swinton residence and Monica are reconstructed according to David's memories, yet each seems different to him. Once again he tells Monica 'I found you' and their entire day together is essentially a reconstruction of David's memories: making Monica coffee, just the way she likes it ('you never forget, do you?'), painting his memories of the Flesh Fair, Gigolo Joe and the amphibio-copter, and celebrating his birthday (recalling the event at Martin's birthday, which prompted Monica's abandonment of David). What is being suggested at this point is that the reconstruction of David's memories results in a forgetting, or screening, of the trauma of Monica's abandonment, in tandem with the full exposure of the Real. David is essentially a post-apocalyptic inscription insofar as he is coded to re-present and re-live the past, and therefore both embodies and screens past-ness. The trope of the sequel functions in much the same



manner. By infringing upon the memory of the 'original' and continuing or adding to that memory, sequelization perpetuates the act of remembering, which is an act grounded in the present. David dies at the end of the film when he returns to the origins of his memory, when the Real is made possible, yet the suggestion is that his death is a kind of life, or a return to the virtual subconscious.

In conclusion, the notion of the Real as both a remainder of and an urge to repeat the Imaginary informs the film's construction of a virtual subconscious, insofar as the virtual is removed from human reality and is entirely preoccupied with the sense of absence and reconstruction. Moreover, the repetition of the Real appears in David's case to create, at a very subconscious level, every experience and urge as a repetition of the 'thing itself', of his object of desire, which, as I have demonstrated, is essentially himself. David's repetitious perpetuation of his own subjectivity – as complex a notion as it appears – creates narrative trajectories of interrelated events and identities that are ultimately past-bound. This is because David is programmed to be past-bound; he is the sequel that persistently looks back at the past whilst reconstructing that past in the future. The *fort/da* dichotomy underscoring Freud's thesis of the pleasure principle – and the memory of his mother in the wardrobe – is very much part of the sequel's investment in reconstruction. Yet the sequel's self-consciousness of reconstruction and memory as entirely subjective scenarios interrogate contemporary memory politics – made evident by 'public memory' spaces – by repositioning the subject in remembering. David's virtual subjectivity and memory are secondary insofar as they continue the memories of his creator and 'original', which also frame David's own memories. The symbolic domination of the circle, then, serves to indicate the process of the Real in the virtual landscape as neither a straightforward shot/reverse shot dialogue nor a projection of desire, but as the continual repetition of memory, the origin or 'kernel' of which lies in the terrain of the Imaginary.

**Adam Lowenstein, *Shocking Representation: Historical Trauma, National Cinema, and the Modern Horror Film*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005, 255pp.**

**KATHERINE ROWE**

The subtitle of *Shocking Representation* establishes the key terms of Adam Lowenstein's new study of modern horror films, but gives little hint of its transformative aims and its scope. In every register it claims, the book sets out to overturn conventional wisdom. This is a genre analysis that disrupts the familiar taxonomies and boundary effects of genre. Tracing the work of horror films across national borders, media and historical periods, Lowenstein shows it to be a form continually cross-pollinating with other kinds, including its apparent opposite, art cinema. This is also a study of representations of historical trauma – across five national cinemas – that runs against some strong currents in trauma theory and that challenges familiar genealogies of cinematic nationalism. It is also a Benjaminian view of mass art that seeks alternatives to the psychoanalytic models of affect and address so long dominant in cinema studies. For all its close focus on horror film then, this is a study of remarkable scope and for all its transformative aims, one that is far from combative or contrary. Lowenstein writes in fluent, thoughtful and economic prose that makes these complex arguments immediately engaging.

The topics of genre, cinematic emotion, history and nation are central and vexed ones in cinema studies, and Lowenstein approaches them as ongoing conversations with long intellectual histories. Theorists formerly known as grand – among them Benjamin, Freud and Bourdieu – figure in that conversation as interlocutors rather than as personifications of a generalized method that needs either to be swallowed whole or demystified. Their specific insights about

historiography, narrative and violence and the social workings of taste are instrumental to Lowenstein's rethinking of horror films as a mode of cultural allegory, but they serve more as touchstones than rhetorical apparatus. Lowenstein's analysis unfolds in incisive, historically contextualized readings that tease out the complex ways in which an apparently one-dimensional idiom – devoted to shock and gross-out – reflects on the transnational wounds of the Holocaust, Hiroshima and Vietnam.

At first glance, the work of this book appears to be restoration and recovery. Lowenstein centres each chapter on a pioneer whose commitments to the apparently trivial idiom of the horror film contributed to his marginalization from dominant narratives of national cinema. These include Georges Franju and the post-World War II French *nouvelle vague*, Michael Powell and the parallel history of British 'kitchen sink' realism, Shindo Kaneto and post-Hiroshima constructions of Japanese art film, Wes Craven and post-Vietnam divisions between art and exploitation in American popular media, and David Cronenberg and the vexed problem of authenticity itself as a foundational wound in the story of Canadian cinema. As the meta-critical turn in this last example suggests, Lowenstein views the marginalization of each of these film-makers – and the systematic devaluation of horror films as a genre – as symptoms of larger conceptual fractures within the national imaginaries that have developed around the traumas of twentieth century history. His point is not that these filmmakers should be given pride of place in their respective national cinema histories, but that their work profoundly destabilizes those histories. Films such as *Le Sang des bêtes/Blood of the Beasts* (Franju, 1949), *Onibaba* (Kaneto, 1964) and *Last House on the Left* (Craven, 1972) systematically challenge the structuring binaries of their national imaginaries: melancholy repetition of trauma vs working through, art film vs exploitation and trash, sensation vs intellectation, shock vs contemplation, realism vs modernism, national vs popular.

One of the great pleasures of reading this book is following the incisive turns of Lowenstein's analytic screw as he works through the social and aesthetic challenges launched by each film and then takes up their historiographic implications. A sketch of the structure of Chapter 1 provides a feel for the way he stages his arguments. The chapter is anchored in an analysis of Franju's *Blood of the Beasts* and *Eyes without a Face* (1960) – surrealist syntheses of Grand Guignol theatre and the clinical address of the science film that insist on the immediate, intimate connections between everyday life and the horrors of history. Nuanced close-readings establish Franju's films as trauma narratives, blending contemporary iconography of the Holocaust and the Algerian war in a way that foregrounds the brutal role of the French. Lowenstein's descriptions of camera work, sound track, and *mise-en-scène* orient the reader with wonderful concreteness and economy.

With each reading Lowenstein progressively expands his view, teasing out the confrontations between Franju's particular order of shock and the cinematic, historical and narrative decorum that prevailed in postwar French culture. (The dominant strands are a fetishization of the Resistance and government censorship of the Algerian war.) Observations about the film are a stepping stone, in turn, to a longer exposition of the connection between contemporary decorum of the 'national film' and the purifying, de-politicizing mythologies of cinema constructed around and by proponents of the French New Wave. Taking Truffaut's privatized, 'timeless', progressive modernism as exemplary, Lowenstein contrasts it with Franju's visceral, contaminating aesthetic, one that demands that we live with the dead. Through these unfolding stages of analysis, the chapter ranges remarkably widely. Lowenstein looks back to European Baroque theatre and the Gothic novel and across to other sensational forms such as melodrama. He explores fractures within the surrealist aesthetic and touches down in the *Cahiers du Cinema* debates. He draws on contemporary science films and on diverse writings about the Algerian war, from Sartre to Henri Alleg.

The same clear through-line of argument, interdisciplinary range and depth of analysis characterize every chapter of the book. Throughout, Lowenstein is concerned to show not only that these films are historical allegories but to explain *why* allegory should be the fictional mode of choice at each moment, for each filmmaker. What kind of leverage does the graphic symbolism of horror offer representations of traumatic history? Lowenstein's answer has to do with the historical convergence between specific realist aesthetics and specific national imaginaries. That convergence is inflected differently at different moments and in different cultures, but it shares common features, in part because of the national traffic in 'new wave' models (Japanese from French, British from Canadian, and so on). In the context of this transnational new wave, the graphic symbolism of horror film offers a kind of counter-realism, exposing the historical conditions and political interests behind any claim to represent things 'as they are now'. The example of British documentary realism, which Lowenstein explores in Chapter 2, illustrates the political work of this postwar new wave especially clearly. Drawing on a range of scholarship and contemporary criticism, Lowenstein sketches the rise of British documentary realism between and after the wars, teasing out the class fractures embedded in its characteristic modes of address (a middle class 'we' observing a working class 'them'). In this context, it is immediately clear how horror's combination of symbolic narrative and graphic visuals might be marshalled, as it is in Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), to confront fantasies of national unity produced under the sign of 'direct emotional realism'. *Peeping Tom* effectively dismantles any comfortable we/them class structure that might be mapped onto cinematic address, and in the process it challenges the aesthetic binaries (realism vs fantastical artifice) that ground fictions of British unity. Powell's innovation is to answer an

- 1 Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds), *Reinventing Film Studies* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2000).

apparently consensual model of realism (that falsely collective ‘we’ of documentary address) with one that is both viscerally and ideologically non-consensual.

For Lowenstein, the larger interest of horror as a mode of historical allegory has to do with its potential for painting a more nuanced picture of the representational possibilities of trauma. The idea of a transformative ‘allegorical moment’ in narrative, derived from Benjamin, drives the argument along three parallel paths. The first is Lowenstein’s critique of the concept of realism itself, in line with developments elsewhere in film studies – see, for example, the essays collected under the header ‘Aesthetics’ in *Reinventing Film Studies*.<sup>1</sup> What Lowenstein tracks, convincingly, is a series of competing claims to authenticity, to the actual, to ‘the way things are now’, and to immediacy. In the process he shows the historiographic stakes of privileging, say, Truffaut’s apparently apolitical hand-held camera over Franju’s graphic clinicalism; or the ‘kitchen sink’ realism of a John Grierson over Powell’s ‘under-the-skin horrors’. By Chapter 5, which offers a study of Canadian cinematic nationalism, such policing of realist modes is shown to be deeply pernicious. Its effects are typified in the dead hand of Griersonian documentary, acting through the National Film Board of Canada (NFBC) aesthetic guidelines that for so long held Canadian film moribund. In a convincing and witty turn, Lowenstein explains NFBC realism as a kind of zombie aesthetics, effectively colluding with its own marginalization in the name of national specificity.

The second governing interest of this study is to historicize this new wave – the construction of a national cinema under the sign of a transformative realism – in a transnational context. There is much here that will be of interest to scholars working on global and transnational cinema, fields putting increasing pressure on familiar constructions of national cinema along the axes of art film, auteurism and New Wave. As Lowenstein explains in Chapter 4, the label New Wave has functioned historically ‘to include and exclude certain films as “political” and “apolitical” while constructing a . . . national cinema [variously French, Japanese, British, US, and Canadian] for film history’. What is most provocative here is not the claim itself but how Lowenstein plays it out. The founding of a national New Wave is to cinema history as ‘narrative fetishism’ is to a national imaginary: a fictional structure that covers over traumatic fractures of nation and history, substituting comfortably unified stories for the disorderly, even violent, disjunctions of history. The heterogeneous aesthetics of horror – insistently graphic but also symbolically abstract, restoring ‘visceral political affect to public history’ – have the potential to expose such fetishizing structures.

This potential underpins a third line of argument, that an analysis of horror films can help recast some central binds in trauma criticism. In invoking the idea of narrative fetishism (borrowed from Eric Santner’s work on postwar German cinema), Lowenstein puts himself in conversation with Santner, Thomas Elsaesser and Saul Friedlander. Like

these critics, Lowenstein is committed to dismantling reductive oppositions between the compulsion to repeat trauma and the triumph of mastery. His arguments about the allegoresis of the Holocaust in Franju's work and of Hiroshima in Kaneto's mount a direct challenge to the 'unrepresentability thesis' in trauma studies – instantiated in its most extreme form in Elie Wiesel's observation, after *Shoah*, that the Holocaust was not an historical event but a metaphysical one.

Throughout *Shocking Representation*, Lowenstein returns repeatedly to Walter Benjamin's model of the allegorical moment as a shock of awakening into the estrangements of modernity. Benjamin's readings of the death's head and ruin as figures of entropy help to gather the conventional furniture of horror fiction – animated corpses, bodies graphically wounded and decomposing, grasping hands, haunted landscapes – into a coherent metafictional system. Interestingly, the Benjamin figured here is a non-nostalgic, constructivist thinker, not the technophobic one more familiar to media history. This is not so much a slight of hand on Lowenstein's part as an expansion of the idea of allegorical shock, in terms more consistent with Benjamin's longer view of history (looking back to the seventeenth century) than with his arguments about the alienations of modern technology. What Benjamin sees as the potential homeopathic effects of cinema as an apparatus (therapy against the shocks of modernity, effected through a medium of strategic counter-shocks) Lowenstein reinterprets as a narrative effect (albeit one that is particularly strong in audio-visual fiction). Shock emerges here as a potential of any historical allegory that seeks to viscerally command our attention to what cannot be assimilated into dominant stories about the relation between past and present.

Given its emphasis on the political scripting of emotion, it is tempting to connect *Shocking Representations* to the tide of emotion studies rising in almost every discipline. To do this is in one sense to over-read Lowenstein's project. For all that affect – horror, shock, disgust, fear – is the central engine of this genre, he is not engaged in a thoroughgoing account of emotion in the cinema, nor of the cultural history of emotion as such. Yet it would be easy to imagine a syllabus that uses the book in this way. One might contrast Lowenstein's historically situated readings of disgust as a category-violating affect with William Ian Miller's transhistorical account of disgust as a social boundary-function.<sup>2</sup> Or one might compare Lowenstein on the ambiguating effects of disgust with Amélie Rorty's new work on the ethics of ambivalence. Lowenstein's basic instinct to address emotion as an historical phenomenon can stand up with the most nuanced and thoughtful studies in this burgeoning arena, eschewing essentialism and the tired Cartesian binaries of mind vs body, rational process vs emotion.

Thinking about this book as a study of film emotions throws into relief genealogical connections to and divergences from some landmark models of cinematic response. Lowenstein builds on Tom Gunning's account of horror as a mode of visceral address to the spectator. Yet he

2 William Ian Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

refuses Gunning's (implicitly Cartesian) division between intellect and sensation when he claims emotions as a medium of explicitly political transactions. Similarly, *Shocking Representation* is clearly indebted to Linda Williams's work on trash and sensation genres. Yet Williams frames horror as a medium of socio-emotional discipline in a manner that leaves little space for the kind of *detournement* Lowenstein attributes to a confrontational idiom that has more in common with Situationist works such as Maurice Lemaître's *Le Film, est déjà commencé?* (1951) than with *Psycho* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1960).

It is a measure of how compelling Lowenstein's analysis is that, although the actual mechanisms of cinematic affect remain a kind of black box in his argument, his analysis of the scripting of response by horror fictions always seems pertinent. In methodological terms, however, it is worth a small caveat about the leftovers of grand theory that sometimes surface here: a recourse to the representative, collective first person 'we', or generalized 'spectator', to whom the critic can attribute responses consistent with his analysis. For a study so deeply invested in breaking down art film/trash boundaries, it is impossible not to wish for some more thoroughgoing presentation of fan testimony, something like the messy but nuanced heterogeneity found in recent audience studies. To his credit, when Lowenstein does present evidence about affective response – from contemporary film reviews or criticism – he does not oversimplify. The reactions of reviewers emerge here as both authentic and performative, scripted by genuine experience but also conditioned by the decorum of public reception. Indeed, a particular reward of this book is its trove of scandalized, disgusted, diatribes from reviewers – testifying to how effectively the affects of horror film may challenge conventional wisdom about what movies are for and how they should be consumed.

For all its close engagement with cinema history and historiography, then, *Shocking Representation* reaches outside its own disciplinary frameworks in ways that other disciplines will find accessible and welcome. Its roots in comparable disciplines such as American studies and literary studies are evident everywhere. Scholars interested in the construction of national and transnational imaginaries, in emotion and cultural memory as well as genre, allegory and trauma studies will find a rewarding, provocative conversation to join here. Beyond these areas, *Shocking Representation* would make a terrific introduction for any outsider interested in the changing landscape of cinema studies.



Thomas Elsaesser, *European Cinema. Face to Face with Hollywood*.  
Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005, 563pp.

TIM BERGFELDER

Taken from a still depicting Nicole Kidman in Lars von Trier's *Dogville* (2003), the cover illustration of Thomas Elsaesser's latest publication provides an introduction to some of the characteristics and paradoxes of the relationship between European cinema and Hollywood which the book sets out to explore. The image comes from a film which is ostensibly a critique of small-town America, but which also can be seen to comment on the 'fortress' mentality in today's Europe. *Dogville* was produced through the complex processes of independent filmmaking in the EU, combining small-scale entrepreneurship and an internationally acclaimed *auteur* with (sub- as well as supra-) national funding schemes. At the same time the film uses American-accented English dialogue and Hollywood stars such as Kidman and Lauren Bacall. In its length, its arch rhetoric and its Brechtian deconstruction of illusionist techniques, von Trier's film defiantly champions the traditions of European art cinema, yet its narrative draws on Hollywood genres such as the classical gangster film and the rape-revenge movie.

Even without having seen *Dogville*, the reader of Elsaesser's book can sense that the cover articulates a notion of ambiguity. While the subtitle promises a 'face to face' encounter, the image denies an exchange of looks. Captured in profile, Kidman's face is averted; she appears to be asleep, her eyes (wide) shut. The impression thus created is of an encounter at the level of dream, memory and unconscious affinities. This renders the cover image a particularly appropriate visual metaphor in the context of Elsaesser's long-standing interest in cinema's function as a 'historical imaginary'. He has used this concept extensively in his previous influential studies on German Cinema, and

he describes it here as a '*dispositif* that constitutes, through an appeal to memory and identification, a special form of address, at once highly individual and capable of fostering a sense of belonging' (p. 21). The fact that the *Dogville* image in its soft focus and warm sepia colours evokes a feeling of nostalgia is thus equally appropriate, but it can also hint at a possible second meaning – this book suggests that Elsaesser is taking his leave of the historical imaginary and is moving toward more uncharted waters.

*European Cinema. Face to Face with Hollywood* serves two purposes. First, it provides a trajectory through Elsaesser's work on the subject from the 1960s to the present. In reprinting key articles, lectures and interviews with filmmakers, the book confirms its author's status as one of the pivotal figures in establishing European cinema studies across the past five decades – both in academia and in the wider sphere of film criticism. The primary focus of these texts is on the 1970s and early 1980s, with an emphasis on specific movements and national developments (unsurprisingly, the New West German cinema, but also British and Eastern European film), or particular art house auteurs (e.g. Bergman, Losey, Makavejev and Greenaway). Several of the selected essays (many of them originally published in *Monthly Film Bulletin* and *Sight and Sound*) not only encapsulate, in retrospect, the ideological and aesthetic agendas and debates of their time, but appear to have been highly prescient of the developments in both film theory and practice which lay ahead of them. Evident throughout these pieces is not only Elsaesser's passionate partisanship for European art cinema (and his love of film more generally), but also his insistence on seeing Hollywood and European cinema as perpetually interconnected. Throughout his writings, Elsaesser refutes the 'view that Hollywood and television are the threats that cinema in Europe has to be protected from' (p. 18).

*European Cinema* is however not simply a 'best of' collection. Elsaesser frames and complements his earlier texts by a more panoramic discussion of the wider implications of the notion of European cinema. In these sections, which comprise the first five chapters of the book as well as its conclusion, he develops a sustained definition of what the term European cinema might mean in the twenty-first century, and in the process provides a pertinent analysis of European identity more generally. In the chapter 'European Cinema: Conditions of Impossibility', Elsaesser opens his discussion with the seemingly paradoxical premise that 'there is no such thing as European cinema' and yet 'European cinema exists and has existed since the beginning of cinema' (p. 13). At the heart of this paradox lies the perception of cinema in Europe not as a supranational entity, but at best as a loose confederation of largely autonomous national film cultures.

This perception, of course, ties in with wider evaluations of the 'national' and the 'European'. Elsaesser confronts the long-standing discursive as well as political impasse between nationalist and supranational tendencies in Europe and he distinguishes between

national identity as a productive, enabling force and as a mechanism of exclusion and oppression. As a way out of this impasse, the chapter 'Double Occupancy and Small Adjustments' proposes a new perspective that cuts across dichotomies of national vs European and self vs other. Elsaesser suggests that in today's Europe – post-communism, post-Balkan wars, post-9/11, post-EU-enlargement and post-Iraq – previous attitudes (whether supra-Europeanist or Eurosceptic) may no longer reflect the direction in which Europe is heading. To facilitate a new perspective, Elsaesser coins the phrases 'double occupancy' and 'mutual interference'. The latter term he adopts from the writings of diplomat and Blair advisor Robert Cooper, the former he glosses with the observation that 'there is no European, in other words, who is not already diasporic in relation to some marker of difference – be it ethnic, religious or linguistic – and whose identity is not already hyphenated or doubly occupied' (p. 108). The two phrases thus encompass mechanisms and processes that are not essentialist and rooted but performative and context-dependent. They allow for a pragmatic negotiation of localized (and frequently sub-national) needs, while also acknowledging global and international agendas outside Europe. In certain ways, Elsaesser sees the concept of identification itself being superseded by processes of interference, appropriation and impersonation, which in turn question his own previous master trope of the historical imaginary.

There is clearly an idealistic element to Elsaesser's terms – he rejects the 'generalized label of postmodernism' (p. 78), calls for a critical stance that maintains 'a political agenda and an ethical imperative' (p. 79) and sees 'double occupancy as a kind of counter-metaphor to "Fortress Europe"' (p. 108). At the same time, and this may be regarded as one of the book's more controversial pronouncements, Elsaesser seems doubtful about concepts such as cultural diversity and about the potential of cultural hybridity in itself as a marker of progressiveness. In the light of recent events (he cites the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a Muslim fundamentalist, as well as 'rivalries among different ethnic communities and immigrant generations', p. 110) he also distances himself from a too optimistic interpretation of multiculturalism (p. 110). Instead, Elsaesser insists on the simultaneously comic, tragic and utopian dimensions the term double occupancy implies. Moreover, the term retains the connotations of conflict and power relations that are essential for an understanding of the way in which the national and the European interact in a global force field.

What makes Elsaesser's terminology so useful is that it establishes productive analogies between the political and psychological makeup of contemporary Europe, the artistic and industrial practices, infrastructures and networks of an increasingly globalized film industry as well as, ultimately, the specific narrative and generic strategies filmmakers employ. Elsaesser effortlessly shifts from macro-analysis to close textual readings, shedding light on and finding commonalities among such diverse filmic examples as *Trainspotting* (Danny Boyle, 1996),

*Le Fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain* (Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 2001), *Goodbye Lenin!* (Wolfgang Becker, 2003) or the documentaries by Dutch filmmaker Johan van der Keuken. While defending *Amélie* and *Goodbye Lenin!* against charges of simply pandering to nostalgic escapism, Elsaesser is, however, not wholly won over by the new European cinema that has replaced the kind of filmmaking practice he has championed over the last few decades. Suggesting that European cinema has become 'post-national', advertising its 'markers of provenance' merely as a strategy to compete in the global market as one isolated facet of a more diffuse 'world cinema' label (p. 82), he argues that most 'world cinema' is 'formally speaking art cinema "light"' (p. 509). In a more hopeful conclusion Elsaesser predicts that

what makes European cinema European would be its capacity for cultural competence, rather than its assertion of cultural identity . . . It is as if European cinema first had to learn to be world cinema, with all the dangers of self-othering this entails, before it can be (once more?) European, that is to say, before it recognizes its part in the process of becoming a stranger to its own identity, while no longer understanding this identity only 'face to face with Hollywood' (p. 511).

One of the central spaces for Elsaesser within which the parameters of European cinema and its relationship to the global film market are being defined is the film festival circuit. Referencing Pierre Bourdieu and Manuel Castells, Elsaesser makes a strong case for the way in which the spatial and temporal properties of festivals, their selection criteria and their function as events and spectacles aid in determining filmmaking trends and patterns of distribution for independent productions across borders. It is with regard to these networks that Elsaesser's argument is at its most utopian and perhaps in consequence also most open to debate, as it highlights a certain selectiveness in his overall vision of European cinema. Elsaesser deems film festivals 'the symbolic agoras of a new democracy – repositories and virtual archives of the revolutions that have failed to take place in Europe over the past 50–60 years, but whose possibilities and potential they keep alive' (p. 104). While one may agree with the idealistic impulse behind this statement, I believe it does pose questions: if the film festival is indeed the new agora, then who participates in this new media democracy, apart from a mobile elite of tastemakers that includes auteurs, producers, distributors, film critics, festival organizers and policymakers? All festivals create, as Elsaesser himself outlines, their own constituencies. What is implied in Elsaesser's conceptualization of European cinema is a highly specialized mode of filmmaking that addresses a selective audience of professionals and connoisseurs. This focus comprises a highly influential body of films and spectators, but it does occasionally seem to add up to a vision of cinema from an executive viewpoint. Largely absent from this conceptualization are the ultimate recipients, or indeed failed recipients; the fickle and distracted mass audiences, even in their stratification into art house

patrons and multiplex visitors (let alone more complex subdivisions). Yet it is precisely these audiences that still make Europe a strong market proposition – for European productions as well as for Hollywood.

Equally peripheral to Elsaesser's overall picture are European cinema's popular traditions (e.g. the Carry On films, Louis de Funès comedies, German Westerns) that throughout cinema's history have competed with Hollywood with varying but not negligible success, both at a domestic and a trans-European level. Although Elsaesser does acknowledge these traditions at various points in the book (on p. 47 he asks 'are these not part of European cinema?'), one does not get the impression that he is particularly interested in them and he does not consider how the legacy of such traditions might impact on some of his wider assumptions, especially concerning periodization. Thus, at one point he does admit that there is a continuing popular element in European cinema production (exemplified by German cartoon comedies, the French *cinéma du look*, among other examples, on p. 83) and he also acknowledges the continuing relevance of older popular traditions as 'cult objects' for younger generations (p. 493). Yet he also argues that such traditions came to a definitive end as a viable mode of filmmaking in the late 1960s and he appears to dismiss the 'critical recovery of popular European cinema' as an 'antiquarian and nostalgic' pursuit, 'mixed with a camp appreciation of its insouciance, energy, and naivety, and bolstered by a righteous indignation at the "neglect" it has suffered' (p. 488).

I would argue that this assessment underestimates the continuing relevance of popular tendencies in European cinema, not simply in terms of current productions or artefacts from previous decades, but also with regard to persisting infrastructures, production strategies and company trajectories. Many of these may have changed their appearance beyond recognition since the 1960s, but they frequently still exist in different guises. The case of producer Bernd Eichinger, who Elsaesser holds up as a latter-day Erich Pommer (pp. 314–6), is one such example, and elsewhere I have argued how much Eichinger's strategies can be compared with those of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, I think Elsaesser overestimates the real differences between high- and low-brow traditions in European cinemas. An opportunity is missed to reflect on the reciprocal relations, overlaps and analogies between these modes of film practice, which Elsaesser so perceptively analyzes with regard to the relationship between European art cinema and Hollywood. In fact, it is possible to demonstrate the metaphors of double occupancy and mutual interference within popular European cinema as much as in the sphere of art cinema (and this is something popular cinema historians might take up after reading this book), while practices of European coproductions and the transnational transfers of popular genres might occupy a space similar to the location that the film festival occupies in Elsaesser's model.

<sup>1</sup> Tim Bergfelder, *International Adventures: German Popular Cinema and European Co-Productions in the 1960s* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2005), pp. 237–49.

Questions such as these undoubtedly constitute only the beginning of a long discussion and critical dialogue concerning the arguments Elsaesser presents here. The great contribution of *European Cinema* is the way in which it thoroughly scrutinises notions of how to theorize European cinema, and it achieves this with such encyclopaedic range and provocative rigour that it will be difficult to ignore its main hypotheses for a considerable time to come.

**Stella Bruzzi, *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-War Hollywood*. London: BFI, 2005, 216pp.**

**Mike Chopra-Gant, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America: Masculinity, Family and Nation in Popular Movies and Film Noir*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2006, 219 pp.**

## MARTIN FRADLEY

The notion that normative American masculinity has somehow been in turbulent states of ‘crisis’ since the end of World War II is unquestionably a prevalent discourse in popular and critical circles. Susan Faludi’s influential (if hyperbolic) treatise on the crippling misrecognition of the male incumbents of the American century inadvertently underlines the melodrama at the core of this postwar narrative, a cyclically rambling fantasy seeped in Oedipal betrayal and social and political castration anxiety.<sup>1</sup> These two volumes engage in differing ways with the symbiotic relationship between the historical angst of American masculinity and the USA’s global film industry: one with the celluloid culture of the immediate postwar moment, the other with sixty years of cinematic fatherhood in Hollywood representation.

In a recent essay, Oliver Harris notes that the single trait forming a historically unifying consensus amongst critics of film noir is ‘the endlessly repeated insistence that noir is *fascinating*’.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, even while the noir canon is now widely acknowledged as a retrospective fantasy, it nevertheless remains a staple of the screen studies curriculum and forms the basis for a veritable mini-industry of scholarly and popular criticism. At the epicentre of Mike Chopra-Gant’s *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America* is a relatively uncontroversial critical project which aims to challenge the overdetermined status of film noir as *the* emblematic expression of the neurosis, anxiety and paranoia that are supposedly symptomatic of American culture in the period of immediate

<sup>1</sup> Susan Faludi, *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the Modern Man* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Oliver Harris, ‘Film noir fascination: outside history, but historically so’, *Cinema Journal*, vol. 43, no. 1 (2003), p. 3.



- 3 James Naremore, *More Than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), p. 2.

- 4 Steve Neale, *Genre and Hollywood* (London: Routledge, 2000).

- 5 Peter Krämer, *The New Hollywood: from Bonnie and Clyde to Star Wars* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005).

postwar upheaval and readjustment. Not unlike James Naremore, who argues that the alluring mythology of noir 'has become one of the dominant intellectual categories of the late twentieth century, operating across the entire cultural arena of art, popular memory, and criticism', Chopra-Gant readily acknowledges the pervasive influence of this darkly oneiric mode.<sup>3</sup> In contradistinction to Naremore, however, the author staunchly resists the beguiling pull of noir's seductive shadows.

In placing noir in diametric opposition to 'popular movies' in the title of this volume, Chopra-Gant signals from the outset the rhetorical binary which structures this modestly revisionist venture. Dutifully following the work of Naremore and Steve Neale, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America* strives to resituate and recontextualize noir both historically and within the scholarly canon.<sup>4</sup> Arguing that the most popular films of the postwar period have been critically erased from film studies' historical consciousness by the fetishistic insistence upon noir as the zeitgeist-capturing genre *par excellence*, Chopra-Gant instead turns to a series of films – none of which could be categorized as 'noir' – that had instead the highest US box office returns of the period, in order to firmly rebut standard claims concerning noir's uncanny encapsulation of 'the preoccupations, anxieties, values and "mood" of American society at the time' (p.10). Emphasizing the reductive tendencies of a zeitgeist approach to genre history (an approach which, he argues, invariably foists a singular, monologic voice upon a heterogenous and polyvocal culture), Chopra-Gant takes an exclusive focus on the most popular films of 1946 as his 'synchronic snapshot of the film culture during that immediate postwar moment' (p. 17).

Given that 1946 is the year of Hollywood's all-time-high attendance figures, this strategy has some rhetorical force; furthermore, there is unquestionably something admirable about the author's uncompromisingly detailed attention to a singular twelve-month period in American cultural history. In this way, Chopra-Gant explicitly aligns himself with what might be dubbed the empiricist turn within screen studies; in similar fashion to, say, Peter Krämer's recent monograph on the so-called 'New Hollywood', Chopra-Gant examines the most commercially successful movies of the period within the context of contemporary middlebrow discourses, strategically repositioning noir's appeal to 'intellectual, highbrow tastes' (p. 8) to the margins of the period's popular culture.<sup>5</sup> Yet in displacing scholarly fascinations with the ring of the box office till – by analyzing, for example, in methodical and largely persuasive fashion *The Yearling* (Clarence Brown, 1946) and *Blue Skies* (Stuart Heisler, 1946), rather than perhaps *Gilda* (Charles Vidor, 1946) or *The Big Sleep* (Howard Hawks, 1946) – *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America* arguably falls into a seductively empiricist 'honey pot'. While it is certainly difficult to disagree with Chopra-Gant's central proposition that noir's pre-eminence as a hypersensitive barometer of the cultural moment has been repeatedly overstated, for this reader the alternative emphasis on material profit as the key indicator of

6 'Top 10 U.S. Films', *The Guardian: Film & Music*, Friday 21 April 2006, p. 15.

7 Alexander Nemerov, *Icons of Grief: Val Lewton's Home Front Pictures* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005).

historical and cultural sensitivities is equally problematic. Importantly, this approach casually elides the commercial and marketing forces that directly influenced what audiences of the period went to see (a factor which the author belatedly acknowledges in the closing pages of the book). To illustrate my point in the most banal terms: at the time of writing, *Scary Movie 4* (David Zucker, 2006) sits atop the US box-office chart with gross takings of some \$40.22 m in its first week of release.<sup>6</sup> I am willing to wager that it is not simply highbrow elitism that leaves me confident that cultural historians will not look to the fourth instalment of the hugely successful *Scary Movie* franchise in order to examine the mood of the United States in 2006, although I might cautiously add that the more culturally pessimistic amongst us will doubtless argue that the film is absolutely indicative of the cultural moment.

One might also suggest that the virtual absence of what later became known as 'films noir' from a list of the top-grossing films of 1946 may well be equally symptomatic of the national mood, no matter how 'complicated and often contradictory' (p. 4) the zeitgeist. Alexander Nemerov's recent and brilliant study of RKO's wartime output persuasively demonstrates how acutely repressed feelings of ambivalence and sorrow concerning the conflict abroad were abstractly registered in the mournful films produced by Val Lewton against the grain of patriotic home front optimism.<sup>7</sup> Could it be argued, then, that the less obliquely angst-ridden psychological landscape of noir was simply too 'tough' (to use the author's descriptive term for noir thrillers) to look at for many Americans at the time? Indeed, Chopra-Gant contends that the critically marginalized films he examines (in admirably close detail), such as *Best Years of Our Lives* (William Wyler, 1946), *The Jolson Story* (Alfred E. Green, 1946), *Saratoga Trunk* (Sam Wood, 1945) and *Two Years Before the Mast* (John Farrow, 1946), actually engage with the same issues and anxieties hitherto attributed to the 'noir imaginary' but to more ideologically recuperative ends. Thus, the ostensibly frivolous musical *Blue Skies* engages quite explicitly with concerns about former officers returning to civilian life and struggling to readjust to the less than egalitarian realities of low-grade menial work. Equally, *Saratoga Trunk* mobilizes the trope of the absent father in order to explicate transgressive and excessive female (hetero)sexuality. In addition, heteronormative anxieties concerning the intense homosociality of wartime comradeship are conveniently assuaged in *Best Years of Our Lives* and *The Yearling*. Finally, in a rare moment of critical hyperbole, generic disavowal allows masculinity to become radically de-essentialized in *The Jolson Story*'s revised Butlerian standing as 'one of the clearest cinematic representations of identity conceived as a multi-layered conglomeration of performances' (p. 108).

Although Chopra-Gant labours hard to illustrate that his research revealed 'no single mood or tone . . . that uniformly characterized all of the most popular films', suggesting in turn that 'the dominance of musicals and comedies suggested [to the author] a lighter and more

exuberant mood than the emphasis on film noir in academic writing would suggest' (p. 147), it is difficult to shake off the sense that his thesis merely replaces noir's downbeat ambience with the more optimistic popular films' ideologically reassuring narrative trajectories. In other words, *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America* somewhat disingenuously reverses the popular critical consensus about postwar anxiety by simply testing noir's representativeness of the national mood against the popular texts the author has reclaimed for 1946's hegemonic centre ground. Of course, the vacuum at the centre of this debate is an eternally lost object – the empirical reality of Hollywood's original postwar audience(s). That this book ends with a rallying plea for 'painstaking attention to the empirically available details of movie consumption within a limited and clearly defined setting' as a necessary precursor to 'a greater understanding of which films could best lay claim to the label "popular" in earlier periods' (p. 188) in itself signifies an endless deferral in the pursuit of the irretrievable, a void to which existentially doomed academic sleuths compulsively return.

*Hollywood Genres and Postwar America* functions primarily on two meta-levels: firstly, it works as a generic academic 'rescue fantasy' wherein popular movies which have been pushed off the critical radar by elitist scholars are redeemed and restored to their rightful place in the critical sphere by the populist researcher unafraid to get a little plebeian dirt on his or her hands. Secondly, the book is at its heart a rhetorical treatise on the intellectual righteousness of a 'painstaking' empiricist methodology. One would be foolish to argue with Chopra-Gant's call for a more precise and focused contextualization of films in their historical and cultural moment but, like Robert Mitchum in *Out of the Past* (Jacques Tourneur, 1947) torn away from Virginia Huston and drawn inexorably towards the fatally spectral Jane Greer, it is perhaps a truism that the 'wholesome path' is rarely the most alluring.

For the reader more interested in issues of gender rather than intra-academic conflict, Chopra-Gant's analysis of the preoccupations of 1946's box office hits reveals a series of uncannily over-familiar tropes – the postwar moment forming the primal scene for anxious debates over the always already troubled state of American masculinity. Stella Bruzzi's *Bringing Up Daddy: Fatherhood and Masculinity in Post-War Hollywood* has the self-proclaimed status of being the first book to exclusively examine cinematic representations of the father. While this is, to my knowledge, technically accurate, it is also somewhat disingenuous given that discussions of real or symbolic fatherhood have long been central to debates over masculinity both within and without screen studies. Nevertheless, this chronological survey of celluloid fathers in mainstream American feature films after 1945 offers its own disclaimer in the opening pages: conceived as a 'starting point for further discussion about the father in cinema', Bruzzi's book 'is intended as an introduction, in that it offers a historical contextualisation and a theorisation of the father figure' in addition to 'a critical interpretation of

8 See Stella Bruzzi, *Undressing Cinema: Clothing and Identity in the Movies* (London: Routledge, 1997).

the father and many of the films to which he is key' (p. viii). Like Chopra-Gant then, Bruzzi from the outset carefully defines the limits of her study, and it must be said that to this end (that is, as an introduction) *Bringing Up Daddy* works extremely well.

Echoing the analyses of popular culture in *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America*, Bruzzi states that she wishes to avoid imposing 'an overly prescriptive schema' or a 'false homogeneity' upon her overview of cinematic fatherhood's relationship to American social and cultural history. (p. xi). Unlike Chopra-Gant, however, and in a similar fashion to her earlier work on costume in cinema, Bruzzi foregrounds the theoretical prop of Freudian–Lacanian psychoanalytic paradigms that structure her readings of American film and culture.<sup>8</sup> As she notes astutely, Hollywood's representations of the father would make little psychological or cultural sense 'without recourse to Freud's theories of the primal father, the Oedipus complex, the development of the ego and id, narcissism and masculinity, the uncanny and the development of sexuality' (p. xiv). At the heart of *Bringing Up Daddy*, then, is an interrogation of the fantasy that structures so much of Hollywood's output – the phallogocentric myth of the perfect father.

Alluding to the fact that there are an almost unmanageable number of postwar Hollywood films about fathers, Bruzzi's overview is admittedly and necessarily selective. Nevertheless, lurking behind Bruzzi's argument that fatherhood has been a contested discursive terrain throughout Hollywood's history is the truism that 'the underpinning ideology of father films in Hollywood is conservative' (p. xviii). Taking her cue from Susan Faludi's polemic on the supposedly befuddled state of postwar American manhood, Bruzzi contends that fathers are regularly treated with a mixture of fear and desire in Hollywood representation, an ambivalence which fluctuates in relation to the historical and cultural shifts in the definitions of masculinity. Most significantly, it is the introjective Oedipal melodramatics of father–son relationships which recurs most compulsively as the key ideological motif in Hollywood's patriarchal imaginary.

As such, *Bringing Up Daddy* follows a predictable trajectory for anyone familiar with the debates around gender in American popular cinema: 'the prevailing masculinism of 1950s America' (p. 39) and its discontents is illustrated via Douglas Sirk, James Dean, Benjamin Spock and Alfred Kinsey. The renegotiation of masculinity in the wake of second-wave feminism in the 1960s and 1970s is symbolically articulated by the rejection of the 'bad' fathers of the past such as the literal and figural 'fathers' in *Star Wars* (George Lucas, 1977) and in *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975). This contrasts with the valorization of 'good' fathers typified most obviously by Dustin Hoffman's divorcee in *Kramer vs. Kramer* (Robert Benton, 1979). Bruzzi's argument is bolstered here by a supporting cast including Kate Millet, Germaine Greer, Betty Friedan and Valerie Solanas. The 1980s is the decade of the New Right, Faludi's post-feminist 'backlash' and Robin Wood's

- 9 Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1991). Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1986).

theorization of the restoration of the father as Hollywood's dominant project.<sup>9</sup> In this context the key texts are the film cycles originating with *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Steven Spielberg, 1981), *The Terminator* (James Cameron, 1984), *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985), *Lethal Weapon* (Richard Donner, 1987) and *Die Hard* (John McTiernan, 1988), with honourable mentions also going to rugged individualists Michael Douglas, Tom Cruise, Oliver Stone and (dealt with in agreeably pithy fashion) Robert Bly.

Bruzzi presents the last fifteen years as the most symptomatically father-fixated period since the 1950s, arguing that the slow-burning cultural revolution of feminism is clearly detectable in Hollywood's 'intermingling of radicalism and traditionalism' in its representations of gender, demonstrating in turn that the growing popular understanding of the plural nature of masculinities has led to 'less consistency than ever in Hollywood's depiction of the father' (p. 158). Thus, the reactionary nostalgia of, say, *Gladiator* (Ridley Scott, 2000) is counterbalanced by the gentle destabilizing of heteronormativity in *The Object of My Affection* (Nicholas Hytner, 1998) and *The Next Best Thing* (John Schlesinger, 2000), the gendered performativity of *Mrs Doubtfire* (Chris Columbus, 1993) and the critique of the sins of the patriarch in *Magnolia* (Paul Thomas Anderson, 1999) and *American Beauty* (Sam Mendes, 1999).

*Bringing Up Daddy* is not without its shortcomings, however. Even if we acknowledge the scale of the project, there is certainly a recurrent sense of critical déjà vu as the book works through some well-covered terrain. Yet there are also a number of notable omissions in her broad survey: why no critique of the insidiously paternalistic revisionism of *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994), for example? And why is there no mention of the ideologies of black nationalism that underpin a film such as *Boyz n the Hood* (John Singleton, 1991) in the section devoted to the father in New Black Cinema (pp. 162–169)? Perhaps most surprisingly, there is no discussion of the numerous cinematic engagements with the assassination of the ultimate 'good father' John F. Kennedy which frequently serves as the wildly overdetermined primal episode of postmodern 'decline and fall' and is arguably the key mythology of postwar American culture.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, there is a frustrating reluctance to engage with even the most obvious queer readings of these ostensibly heterosexist films. *Top Gun*'s (Tony Scott, 1986) notorious Reaganite bombast is profoundly undercut by the gleeful high-concept homoeroticism that characterizes the entire film; for Bruzzi, however, the film's glistening male bodies and celebratory locker-room banter are understood as a regressive illustration of Lacan's mirror stage. Similarly, in Bruzzi's discussion of the critical reception of *American Beauty* and *Happiness* (Todd Solondz, 1998) and their contrasting representations of paedophile fathers, there is a transparent evasion of the casual homophobia which led to the latter being 'condemned for its obscenity and ugliness' (p. 184).

- 10 Peter Knight, *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to the X-Files* (London: Routledge, 2000).

while the formers' fascination with Mena Suvari's beauty brought awards and mass acclaim.

*Bringing Up Daddy* is a valuable addition to the growing body of work at the intersection of gender studies and screen studies, and its accessibility means it will doubtless be welcomed on undergraduate courses on American cinema and popular culture. Like *Hollywood Genres and Postwar America*, however, the book's true engagement lies beyond its ostensible subject matter. In a volume that continually returns to explanatory psychoanalytic terminologies, it comes as little surprise that Bruzzi concludes with a Lacanian moral about the 'ultimate masculine melodrama' which tears at Hollywood's patriarchal heartstrings. 'Just out of reach for these flawed fathers lies the perfected image they aspire to but know they cannot match' (p. 191). That age-old mistake – the misrecognition of the (father's ) penis as the phallus – is at the critical heart of *Bringing Up Daddy* and just as the majority of the films Bruzzi analyzes long for the reinstatement of a mythic paternal figure, so too does the book endlessly mourn the displacement of its own paradigmatic fathers: Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

**Susan Courtney, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race, 1903–1967*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005, 376pp.**

**CHARLENE REGISTER**

Susan Courtney has appropriately titled her work, *Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation: Spectacular Narratives of Gender and Race, 1903–1967*. Courtney provides an entertaining, insightful, illuminating (and at times disturbing) discussion of miscegenation and interracial relationships, as reconstructed on screen for over a sixty year period.

Part one, ‘Exhuming the Silent Bodies’, contains two chapters: ‘The Agony of Spectatorship at Biograph’ and ‘The Mixed Birth of the “Great White” Masculinity and the Classical Spectator’. In this section, Courtney establishes the framework for her deconstruction of the history of interracial relationships in cinematic representations. Of note is her examination of several Biograph films that precede Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation* (1915) – a film that would become the signature of interracial strife reproduced on screen. Courtney suggests that many of the conventions that permeated *Birth of a Nation* had been established by earlier screen representations, which had already provided images of white women as tortured spectacles or victims of assault, either at the hands of black men or vengeful white men. In these earlier films, not only did the women suffer, but so too did the white males, and it is these agonized subject-positions that created agony for spectators, thus providing spectatorial pleasure.

Courtney focuses her examination on racial ‘switch’ comedies as early as 1903–8, comedies in which characters are switched from white to black to encourage audiences to ‘share in the joke’ and comedies in which white women are trapped and pursued (1908–12), to provoke



spectatorial pleasures in suffering. She examines Indian films (1908–11) that similarly evoke agonizing pleasures through identification with ‘Red men’ and suffering white male bodies and explores Griffith’s popular Civil War shorts (1911–13) – films that frequently depicted white masculine failure. It is of interest to note the films she included and those she excluded. One wonders whether, if she had selected a different group of films, her conclusions would have remained the same. However she chose them, Courtney makes a strong and convincing case of how these early cinematic representations fed into the later and more classical conventions evident in the dramatic racialized representations that would permeate *Birth of a Nation* – a film which has been examined extensively from its inception.

While it had been assumed that, after the endless critiquing of *Birth of a Nation*, there was nothing left to be said, Courtney is able to provide another engaging critique, full of original ideas and an intriguing discussion designed to titillate the imagination of those interested in films’ racialized representations. First, she prefaces her discussion of this film by examining the black boxer Jack Johnson and then relates this to how his boxing films might have signified in influencing contemporary racial and sexual attitudes. Johnson’s fight films represented an important historical moment and Courtney uses them as a good launching point for her more detailed examination of the period. Establishing a connection between Johnson and the *Birth of a Nation*, she claims that, ‘the repression of the image of a black man beating a white man has everything to do with the production of the image of a black man desiring a white woman’ (p. 50). In critiquing *Birth of a Nation*, she therefore expands on much of the pre-existing literature advanced by, among others, Michael Rogin. Presaging her discussion by analyzing white male suffering – a suffering frequently played out on white female bodies – she sees the film as a vehicle of the ‘miscegenation fantasy’, unable to avoid the contradictory positioning of black masculinity as both a threat to and potent rejoinder to white masculinity. Thus, she suggests that it is through the white male look or gaze that the white male’s mastery is restored in the film.

Courtney follows these arguments with a section introducing Hollywood film censors and their prohibition of miscegenation in films. Under the heading, ‘Color Coding Identity and Desire’, she presents a chapter on the history of miscegenation as remonstrated by Hollywood censors, stating, ‘While fantasies of interracial desire are vivid in silent American cinema, we could miss them altogether in the classical period if we failed to take into account their systematic repression’ (p. 103). Reconstructing the history of miscegenation, with particular reference to the Production Code Administration (PCA) and Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA), Courtney alludes to the contradictory reading of these codes. She claims they directed spectators both ‘to see and not see “race” ’ (p. 104). Illuminating the contradictions inherent in these miscegenation codes, she exposes the

conflicting conceptions of race that were bound to infiltrate these codes. These contradictions lead her to pose the question: ‘What makes a culture, in a century marked by intense waves of racial and ethnic immigration and migration, mixing and contestation, form and sustain the belief that “race” is something we know when we see?’ (p. 113).

Courtney suggests that although these codes implicated other racialized groups, they most frequently referred to whites and blacks, a further testament to their own contradictions. To substantiate her views, she then provides a critique of films that bore out such contradictions, such as in *Night of the Quarter Moon* (Hugo Haas, 1959), in which a woman bares her back in a courtroom as proof of her racial ancestry. This was a scene that might have been hinting at the highly publicized real life case known as the ‘Rhinelander Case’, where a white aristocrat married a woman later revealed to be black. Courtney ends this chapter with a critique of South Sea Island films, arguing that as a genre:

(1) it displaced the historical and political realities of the American past and present onto virtually atemporal and aspatial scenes of exotic–erotic utopia; (2) it transposed ostensible ‘nightmares’ of free men of color abusing white women, and disavowed histories of white men abusing enslaved black women, with daydreams of white men being pleased and served by women ambiguously ‘colored’ and decidedly pliant; and (3) it replaced increasingly fraught questions of ‘race’ with a visible, but largely unspoken, discourse of ‘color’ (pp. 133–4).

Most intriguing in this chapter is the fact that Courtney forces the reader to consider how miscegenation was imagined, visually represented and impacted upon other racialized groups in the cinema industry.

In this section, the chapter entitled, ‘Picturizing Race: On Visibility, Racial Knowledge, and Cinematic Belief’, focuses more intently on how race is visibly represented and how race coincided with film censor codes regarding miscegenation in *Imitation of Life* (John Stahl, 1934) and later, *Pinky* (Elia Kazan, 1949). Courtney’s main premise is that these codes shifted in racial meaning from the earlier film to the later film, arguing that ‘close analysis of them and their PCA files will reveal a gradual shift in the location of meaning from invisible discourse of “blood” and ancestry to visual discourses anchored increasingly by the properties of classical cinema itself’ (p. 142). In relation to *Imitation of Life*, Courtney surmises that the PCA conflated miscegenation with ‘passing’, thus complicating Peola’s problematic identity in the film – an identity frequently marked by her ‘dark mother’ Delilah. Courtney is incredibly insightful in unravelling the contradictions and the difficulties of reproducing such racialized subjects on screen. As she declares, ‘While the PCA’s written accounts could counterbalance her exterior “whiteness” by reimposing an interior “blackness” – doubly marking her, in effect, as looking white but being black – that strategy would not

suffice on film. In Hollywood's system of racial difference, a system fully invested in a visual discourse of race, how could the image of a "negro girl appearing as white" be safely projected?" (p. 149). As she questions Peola's racial construction as identified through her black mother, Courtney mentions Peola's absent father. This latter idea may need to be examined in more detail because, if the father's identity does not mark her racial origin, then it does not matter if he is fair in complexion or white. This is a point that deserves further development. The fact is, Peola's racial origin is determined by her black mother regardless of the racial identity of her father because, during slavery, the law stipulated that the mother's race dictated that of the child. Therefore, Peola's struggle is not so much that she is the product of miscegenation but rather that she is a black character who desires to pass as white. At times, Courtney seems to avoid commenting on the overt racial offences made by the film for the substitution of a more critical analysis. Her stance is understandable and even admirable, but she needs to acknowledge such offences, even though this does not support the point she is making.

In her critique of *Pinky*, Courtney does make clear that race is constructed very differently. In this instance, '*Pinky* confronts it through a complex series of inscriptions that direct us as to when to see the white actress who plays Pinky as white, when to see her as black pretending to be white, and when to forget she is white at all and see her as "really" black' (p. 171). While Courtney explains how Pinky's race is commodified on screen through the motif of space affirming the 'cinema's ability to construct from that spatial relation an ensuing psychic identity', she seems to assume that spectators are a monolithic group, failing to assess how black spectators were likely to react to these representations (p. 185).

However, whatever the minimal oversights in her analyses, Courtney does provide an interior gaze on this subject – a gaze that has escaped many other scholars – and one that thoroughly informs her interrogated analyses in ways that make them both skillful and exceptional, bringing incredible insight to her reading of race in these films.

Courtney entitles Section 3, the final section of her book, 'Rebirthing a Nation?', suggesting a deliberate attempt to hint at the surviving impact of *Birth of a Nation*. While acknowledging our continual fascination for interracial relationships, she also calls attention to the deviations from these early representations to a conceivably more progressive era of racialized representations. In 'Chapter V: Out of the Plantation and into the Suburbs. Sensational Extremes in the Late 1950s', Courtney explores several prominent films produced in the 1950s to reflect a new wave of interracial films or miscegenational fantasies. Speaking to 'urgent social questions of their historical moment' (p. 194), Courtney contends that; 'Insecurities about the very meaning and (im)mutability of "male" and "female" were so acute in fifties interracial films . . . that only by paying close attention to how those films negotiate *both* the overt racial struggles *and* the palpable gender anxieties of the postwar era can we begin to

discern how and why miscegenation fantasies vividly pursued and denied in early periods returned, and were revised, with such a vengeance' (p. 198). What is consistent in both these films and those of the past, is that white male privileging remains, however altered, revised, reconfigured and reconstituted through proposals that offer its 'best chances for survival' (p. 202).

In the films examined in this final section, three tropes emerge. These include:

(1) women of color who are imagined to be far more classically 'feminine' than white women and hence provide unique means to restore the white men they love; (2) white women who tend only to exacerbate crises of white masculinity with emergent identities of their own, and who are thus supplanted or refashioned on the kinder, gentler, and more classically spectacular models ascribed to their sexual rivals of color; and (3) less frequently, but pronouncedly, potent men of color whose vision and virility are temporarily unleashed to refortify ailing masculine forms (p. 202).

*Island in the Sun* (Robert Rossen, 1957) constitutes the first trope, *Night of the Quarter Moon*, *The White Orchid* (Reginald Le Borg, 1954), as well as *Sayonara* (Joshua Logan, 1957), exemplify the second trope and *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil* (Ronald MacDougall, 1959) demonstrate the third trope. For example, in *Island in the Sun*, the white male protagonist is a neurotic who commits murder, yet it is through the interracial subplots that his behaviour is accentuated. In *Night of the Quarter Moon*, 'a white man of privilege suffers chronically from war trauma, is plagued by a castrating white woman (a mother in this case), and finds a dreamy lover of color who is hopelessly devout and perpetually hypervisible in ways that offer his greatest hope for recovery' (p. 218). In *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*, following a nuclear war, only three people remain – a white woman, a black man, and a white man. The three have to negotiate their differences recognizing that they are the only survivors in the world. According to Courtney, 'While the white man is absent for the better part of the film, and is sick with radiation poisoning when he finally arrives, the (healthy) black man devotes himself to projects of cultural preservation and restoration that carefully tend to, and arguably refortify, the positions to which the white man eventually returns' (p. 236).

Of these films cited in Courtney's final section, I personally have seen only two – *Island in the Sun*, and *The World, the Flesh, and the Devil*. In relation to these films, Courtney's thoughtful analysis proves again to be indisputably insightful. Courtney suggests that these films reflect not only a shift from the old racial orders as in the plantations or colonies to a new 'suburban migration . . . understood in part as a refusal of anything approaching interracial desire, for example, it is at times imagined in these texts as a means of escape for the mixed and tinted unions that survive' (p. 248). In my opinion, the geographical shifts that Courtney

notes demonstrate her talent in critically analyzing often complex, competing, confusing and at times contradictory cinematic representations. Because both films feature Harry Belafonte, this black male figure is seen as an emergent political figure (given the time period) and thus deserves further examination for his potential displacement of the white male figure.

The final chapter, entitled '*Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* with Eldridge Cleaver and the Supreme Court, or Reforming Popular Racial Memory with Hepburn and Tracy', presents the brilliance of Courtney's critiquing of miscegenation fantasies. In *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (Stanley Kramer, 1967), she connects the convergence of Eldridge Cleaver's *Soul on Ice* (which conveyed Cleaver's discussion of the historical and political implications of interracial relationships) with the 1967 Supreme Court case of *Loving v. Virginia*, which ruled that restrictions on interracial marriage were unconstitutional. As for the film, Courtney sees *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* (1967) as representing classical Hollywood, as much for its cinematic techniques as for its pairing of Spencer Tracy, in his last film, with Katherine Hepburn. Of Cleaver's work, Courtney argues: 'This model, which he refers to as "myth" ... posits identity in U.S. culture as organized simultaneously around two intersecting binary axes; male-female and black-white. For Cleaver, this results in four distinct positions - white man, white woman, black man, and black woman' that are intertwined and joined together by 'two sets of handcuffs' (pp. 252-3). Regarding the *Loving v. Virginia* decision, Courtney surmises that, 'even as it boldly indicts the "White Supremacy" of anti-miscegenation laws, the decision remains silent on the histories of institutional oppression and exploitation they sanctioned' (p. 261). Therefore, the case was significant as much for the ruling as for the *history* of this ruling. *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* signified the convergence of these earlier works in all of its 'avowed and disavowed American legacies of interracial sex' in that it could not escape the patriarchal gaze from which this complexity evolved (p. 265).

In fact, Courtney contends, '*Guess's* patriarchal plot nonetheless secures the white man's authority over the white woman and her black lover by having the first finally declare that the only thing that matters is the love and regard of two individuals for each other' (p. 268). While giving considerable detail to the patriarchal position assumed by the white male in this film, Courtney pays less attention to the position assumed by the black male figure (played by Sidney Poitier) - a position that deserves further discussion, although not at the expense of diluting her premise regarding a threatened white patriarchy. Courtney ends her discussion by suggesting that

the ultimate lesson perhaps is that in order to continue to repair the damages implicit in dominant screen fantasies of miscegenation, we

need not only to remember the complex social histories they have worked to displace and disavow but also to recognize the consequential positions we can assume in the very processes of consuming, producing, and even renouncing, the fantasies as well as the histories (p. 294).

*Hollywood Fantasies of Miscegenation* will make a major contribution to studies on racialized representations in film history. By establishing a clear connection between the past and more contemporary representations, it serves as a valuable addition to the literature concerning films that foreground issues of miscegenation and interracial relationships. The scope, depth and rigour with which Courtney approaches her topic will make it mandatory for future writers on race and cinema to rethink and re-examine the issues she has presented. Courtney's study deserves to be positioned among the most compelling and comprehensive works produced on this subject.